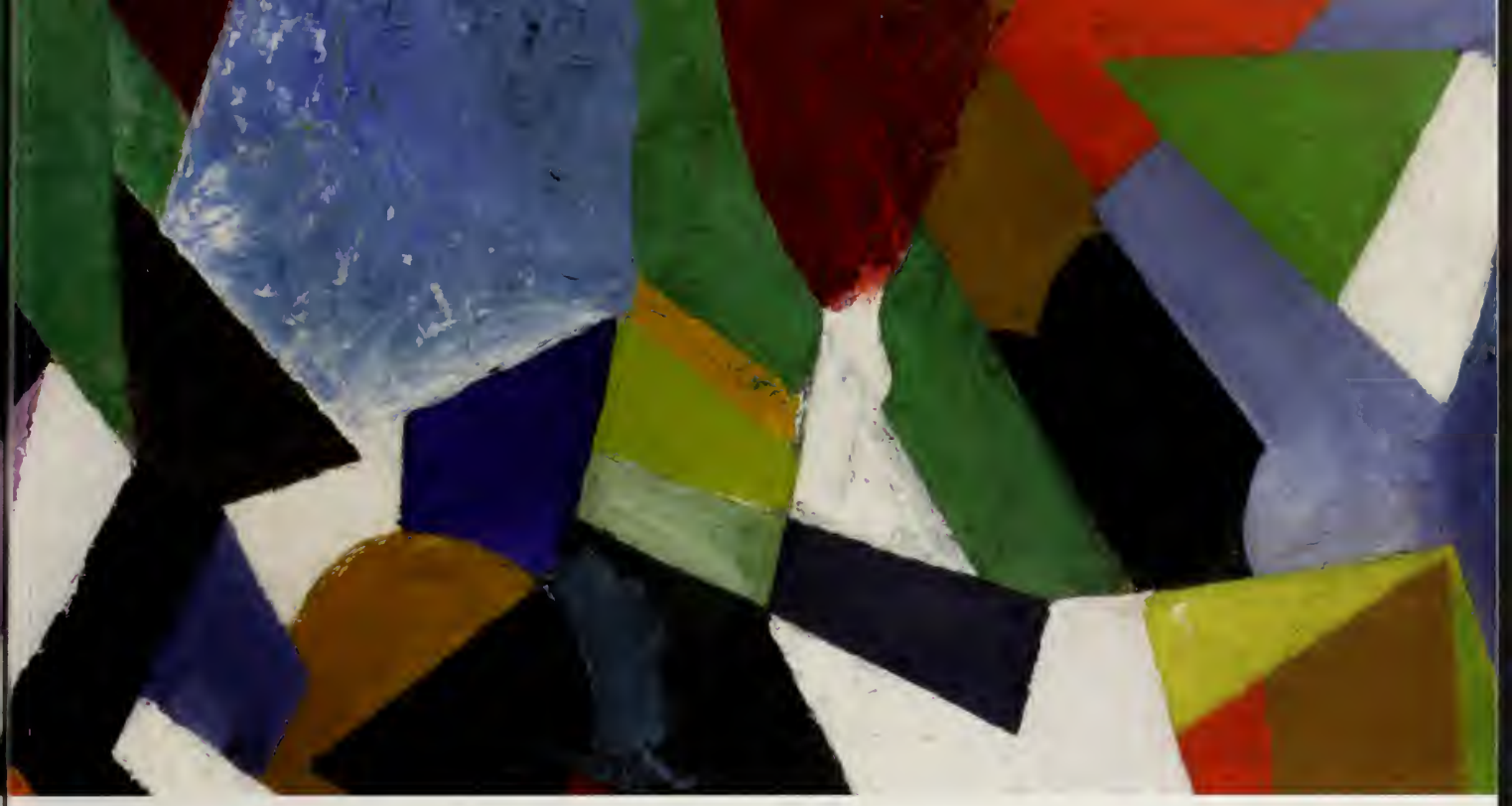
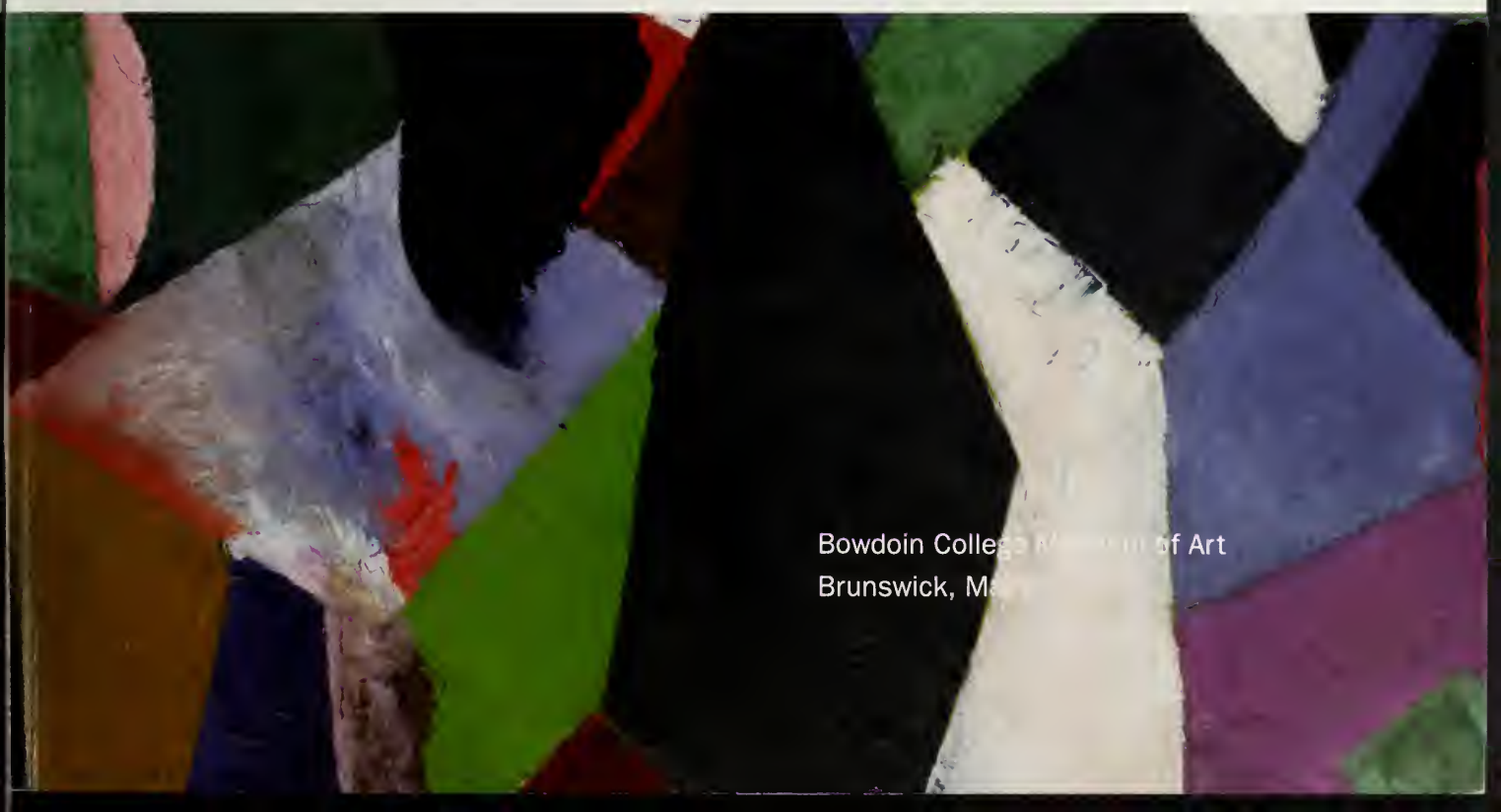


METHODS FOR MODERNISM

American Art, 1876–1925



Bowdoin College Museum of Art
Brunswick, Maine

METHODS FOR MODERNISM

American Art, 1876–1925

Diana K. Tuite
Linda J. Docherty

Bowdoin College Museum of Art
Brunswick, Maine

This catalogue accompanies two exhibitions, *Methods for Modernism: Form and Color in American Art, 1900–1925* (April 8 – July 11, 2010) and *Learning to Paint: American Artists and European Art, 1876–1893* (January 26 – July 11, 2010) at the Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, Maine.

This project is generously supported by the Yale University Art Gallery Collection-Sharing Initiative, funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; a grant from the American Art Program of the Henry Luce Foundation; an endowed fund given by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; and Bowdoin College.

Design: Katie Lee, New York, New York

Printer: Penmor Lithographers, Lewiston, Maine

ISBN: 978-0-916606-41-1

Cover Detail: Patrick Henry Bruce, American, 1881–1936, *Composition II*, ca. 1916. Gift of Collection Société Anonyme, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut. Illustrated on page 53.

Pages 8–9 Detail: John Singer Sargent, American, 1856–1925, *Portrait of Elizabeth Nelson Fairchild*, 1887. Museum Purchase, George Otis Hamlin Fund and Friends of the College Fund, Bowdoin College Museum of Art. Illustrated on page 18.

Pages 30–31 Detail: Manierre Dawson, American, 1887–1969, *Untitled*, 1913. Gift of Dr. Lewis Obi, Mr. Lefferts Mabie, and Mr. Frank J. McKeown, Jr., Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut. Illustrated on page 32.

Copyright © 2010 Bowdoin College

Table of Contents

FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 5

Kevin Salatino

LEARNING TO PAINT:
AMERICAN ARTISTS AND EUROPEAN ART
1876–1893 10

Linda J. Docherty

FORM AND COLOR IN AMERICAN ART
1900–1925 32

Diana K. Tuite

Winslow Homer, American, 1836–1910,
The Fountains at Night, World's Columbian Exposition,
1893. Bequest of Mrs. Charles Savage Homer, Jr.,
Bowdoin College Museum of Art

Foreword and Acknowledgments

Kevin Salatino, Director

Bowdoin College's visionary commitment to the arts is perhaps best exemplified by a surprising event that it sponsored in 1927. From May 2 to May 13 of that year, the College was home to an Institute of Art that featured a host of public lectures by visiting scholars, as well as a series of undergraduate roundtables. The institute was nothing if not ambitious in its objectives. Its program began with a lecture called "Why We Study the Fine Arts" and progressed to encompass such topics as pre-historic art, architecture, prints, and, most notably, modern art. One of the members of the organizing committee, stressing the incubational nature of the institute, declared that it was to be open to members of the local citizenry since "the idea of the committee had been to make the adventure a communal rather than a collegiate privilege."[1]

The Institute of Art introduced the Bowdoin and Brunswick communities to two of the most influential proponents of modern art in America, Walter Pach and Alfred H. Barr, Jr. An artist and critic, Pach had been one of the organizers of the 1913 International Exhibition of Modern Art, known as the Armory Show. Barr, who was then teaching at Wellesley College, would become the first director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1929 and had already gained a reputation as "one of the foremost of the younger interpreters of modern tendencies in Art," according to the institute's program. Indeed, it was the topic addressed by the "very modern" Mr. Barr that engendered the most interest. "They [the students] are 'laying for' Professor Barr of Wellesley and if he goes away without having taught some culture-thirsty undergraduates just how to appreciate the art contributions in *The Dial* there is many a lad – and one professor's wife – who will be profoundly disappointed."[2]

Barr's lecture at Bowdoin was one of a series of talks central to the crystallization of his thinking about modern art. In it, he emphasized the degree to which "progressive" American artists since 1900 had adapted aspects of European tradition to their own needs: "In fact, their sources are, in the main, European although frequently American painters have transformed them into an art which seems to some extent indigenous."[3]

Bowdoin's Institute of Art was met, locally and nationally, with an overwhelmingly positive response. Kenneth C. M. Sills, then president of the College, reflected on the event during his closing remarks: "Feeling that art would not be so popular a theme as either Modern History or Modern Literature, we thought we might be doing a service to Art by this Institute; and we find that Art has done much for us."[4] The remarkable nature of these events was not lost on members of the press. As one journalist noted: "As far as this writer could learn, this is the first time that such an institute or series of conferences has ever been attempted, at least by a New England College."[5]

It is very much in the spirit of the 1927 Institute of Art that the Bowdoin College Museum of Art signed on as a partner in one of the pilot projects of the Yale University Art Gallery's Collection-Sharing Initiative. Funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the initiative supports Yale's pioneering efforts to share their exceptional art collection and resources with six other colleges in the region. Participation in this generous endeavor has allowed us to address one of the more serious lacunae at the Bowdoin College Museum of Art– American modernism. Borrowing significantly from Yale's unparalleled modernist holdings, the Museum elected to organize an exhibition that re-examines a moment of sweeping change in American art. Curated by our Mellon Curatorial Fellow, Diana Tuite, who also wrote the primary essay for this catalogue, that exhibition, *Methods for Modernism: Form and Color in American Art, 1900–1925*, explores the compositional strategies of artists grappling with newly

mobile, and no longer rigidly hierarchical, principles of form and color.

Complementary to *Methods for Modernism*, the pendant exhibition *Learning to Paint: American Artists and European Art, 1876–1893* focuses on Bowdoin's strengths in nineteenth-century American art and introduces the theme of a "language" of painting, one that is developed further in dialogue with *Methods for Modernism*. Associate Professor of Art History Linda Docherty sets these forth in the introductory essay for this catalogue.

Inclusion in the Yale University Art Gallery's Collection-Sharing Initiative has also allowed us to pioneer new and interdisciplinary models of object-based learning in areas that our collections could not otherwise support, to re-contextualize the Museum's permanent collection, and to advance student and faculty scholarship. The faculty-student-public synergy that the initiative makes possible at Bowdoin could only take place at a college or university museum, where experimentation is the norm. But it should be emphasized that this initiative is not about one institution, but rather the collective power of many. Through the largesse and commitment of the Mellon Foundation and Yale University, we have been given the opportunity to reinterpret and reshape the discipline of art history and museum practice to a greater degree than is often possible in a large civic museum.

In concert with *Methods for Modernism* and *Learning to Paint*, the Bowdoin College Museum of Art has organized an ambitious series of exhibitions and programs focused on nineteenth- and twentieth-century American art, engaging the public in a scholarly dialogue and prompting a number of new, cross-curricular teaching initiatives whose repercussions will extend far beyond the duration of the exhibitions. These efforts could not have been possible without additional funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Henry Luce Foundation, to whom we express our gratitude.

We are grateful as well for the leadership and interest of Bowdoin President Barry Mills and to Cristle Collins Judd, dean for academic affairs and professor of music. Their support has been critical to the role of the arts in Bowdoin's academic program and ensures Bowdoin's cultural influence in the world beyond the campus.

Our faculty and staff colleagues have contributed essential support and scholarship to our efforts. We thank in particular Linda Docherty, associate professor of art history; Pamela Fletcher, associate professor of art history, chair of the Department of Art and director of the Art History Division; Marilyn Reizbaum, professor of English; Nancy Grant, educational technology consultant; and Marianne Jordan, director of corporate and foundation relations.

The Yale University Art Gallery provided not only the inspiration and resources for these exhibitions through their collection-sharing initiative, but also the dedication, scholarship, and helpfulness of their professional staff, including: Jock Reynolds, Henry J. Heinz II Director; Pamela Franks, Deputy Director for the Collections and Education; Kate Ezra, Bradley Senior Associate Curator of Academic Affairs; Helen A. Cooper, Holcombe T. Green Curator of American Paintings and Sculpture; Suzanne Boorsch, Robert L. Solley Curator of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs; Lisa Hodermarsky, Sutphin Family Associate Curator of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs; Jennifer Gross, Seymour H. Knox, Jr. Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art; and L. Lynne Addison, Registrar.

The scope of our exhibitions was enhanced by additional works loaned generously by other museums and galleries. From the Colby College Museum of Art, assistance was provided by Sharon Corwin, Carolyn Muzzy Director and Chief Curator. From the Gerald Peters Gallery, we thank Gerald Peters, president, and Catherine Whitney, director of modern and contemporary art; and from the Portland Museum of Art, director Mark Bessire and Tom Denenberg, William E. and Helen E. Thon Curator of American Art and Chief Curator. We also thank James Christen Steward, director of the Princeton University Art Museum, and Laura M. Giles, curator of prints and drawings.

Finally, Diana Tuite of the Museum's staff has been the essential force behind this major new initiative for the Museum and the College. She conceived the project, worked with it from inception through realization, collaborated with Bowdoin faculty and the staff of the Yale University Art Gallery, and integrated the results into the Museum's programs and the Bowdoin curriculum. She was able to do all this with intelligence and grace while also managing her many other responsibilities.

As a reporter for the *Boston Transcript* wrote of the 1927 Institute of Art at Bowdoin, "This in itself is significant of what one small college is doing to keep up the heritage of imparting culture as well as knowledge – something often forgotten in this age of machinery and Big Business. It is something that Bowdoin should get a great deal of credit for."[6]

Notes

1. "Art the Topic at Institute Opening at Bowdoin College: Artists, Critic and Educators of Note Gather at Brunswick for Program of Two Weeks' Duration," unidentified newspaper clipping, Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Papers, The Museum of Modern Art Archives AHB 15.C.1.c.

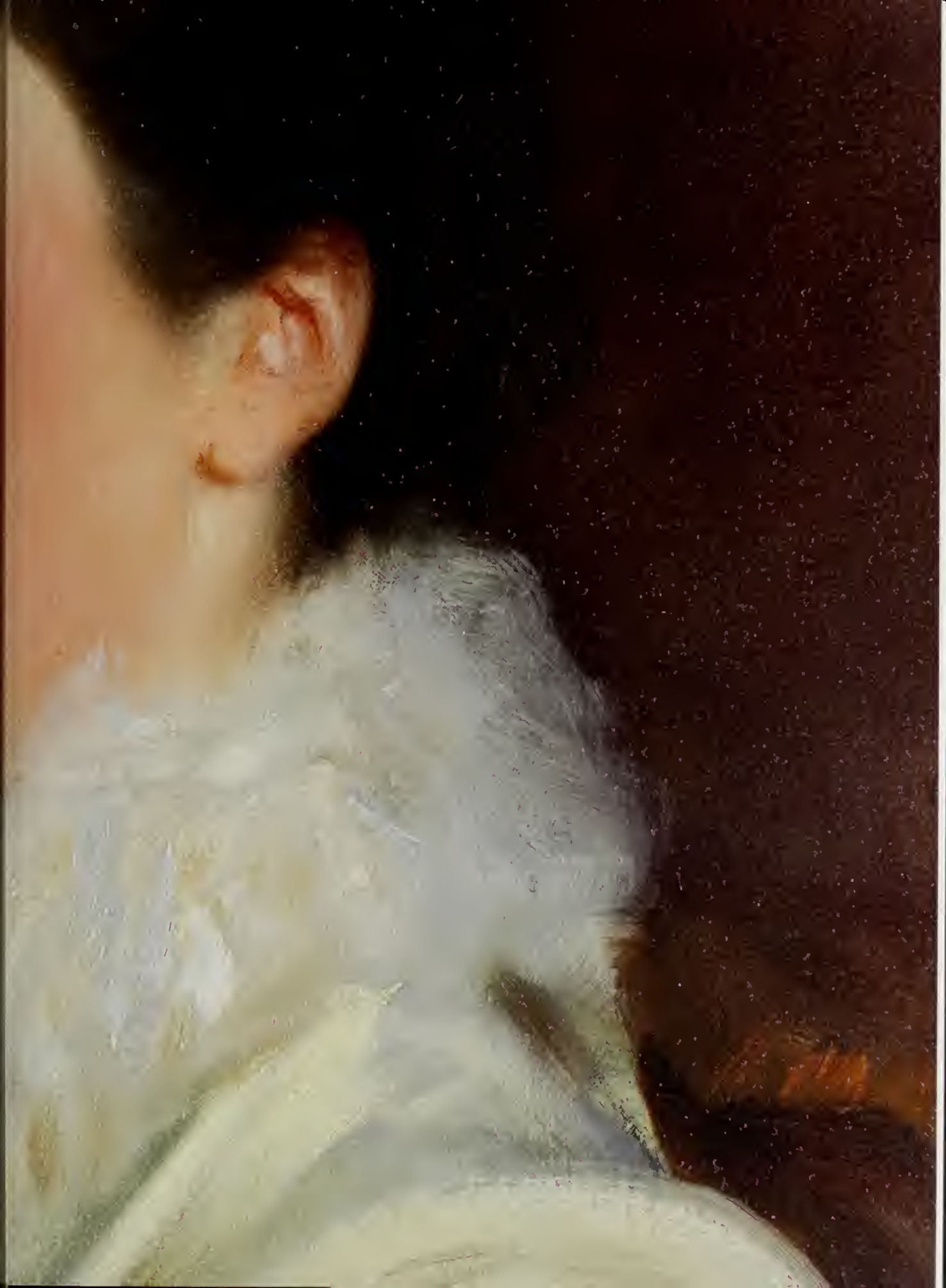
2. Karl Schriftgiesser, "Putting the Fine Arts within Everybody's Reach: Bowdoin's Third Institute Attracts Many Visitors to the Maine College Town," *Boston Transcript*, Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Papers, The Museum of Modern Art Archives AHB 15.C.1.c.

3. "Tendencies in Modern American Painting," *Bowdoin Orient* (May 11, 1927): 3.

4. *Bowdoin College President's Reports, 1921-1931* no. 166 (May 1927): 15.

5. Schriftgiesser, as cited.

6. Ibid.



Learning to Paint: American Artists and European Art 1876–1893

Linda J. Docherty

The painter who knows not how to draw, model, color, and, in short, *paint*, will never excite our emotions by dramatic effect or poetic feeling.... [If] our artist stammer over his alphabet, how shall he tell us of great truths and beauties, or reveal to us his power of imagination?
—John C. Van Dyke[1]

In the aftermath of the Civil War, art critics in the United States began to re-conceptualize their nation's cultural relationship to Europe. Rejecting antebellum notions of American exceptionalism, they called on painters to take their place in a continuum of Western civilization. The art they envisioned would rival that of the Old World and, at the same time, express a New World point of view. To achieve this end, critics argued, American painters must learn to speak the language of art, a language in which Europeans were already fluent. They conceived a national art as the culmination of a developmental process, in which technical training was a preliminary stage. Critics encouraged American art students to learn to paint in Europe, assuming that they would return home and use their knowledge to express distinctively American ideals. They found, however, that the means of art, and how they were acquired, impinged upon the character of the ends.

CRITICAL DISCOURSE

Writers who monitored the progress of American art in the late nineteenth century assumed the responsibility with sophistication and professionalism. These men and women belonged to a class of genteel intellectuals; well educated and widely traveled, they were involved throughout their lives in the study and enjoyment of art. Working independently for the most part, they based their practice in the major cities of the Northeast. Through literary monthlies, journals of opinion, specialized art magazines, and numerous books, they brought art issues to the attention of middle-class readers nationwide. The cause of these writers was a common one: the advancement of art, the legitimization of criticism, and the progress of civilization in the United States.

American critics formulated their discourse in response to a widespread need for guidance in developing both art and taste. In 1879, *Scribner's Monthly* wrote,

Painters today have not a particle of confidence in critics [and the] public has come to pretty much the same conclusion.... What we want of [critics] is instruction in sound principles of art, which will enable us to form judgments and to understand the basis of [theirs].[2]

Rejecting the moralizing polemics of British art-writer John Ruskin, late nineteenth-century critics based their work on the "modern," scientific method of the French critic Hippolyte Taine. In his *Philosophy of Art* (1865), Taine articulated his theory that art was historically determined: a product of race, moment, and milieu. Following his lead, American art-writers sought to ascertain art's origins. Rather than focus on biological and cultural factors, however, they looked for the individual artist's intent. Samuel Greene Wheeler Benjamin explained,

The fundamental principle of Art-criticism is to endeavor candidly to find out what was the purpose in the mind of the artist, what was the ideal conception he had in view, what truth did

he desire to interpret.... [Having apprehended the aim] one can proceed to discuss the question as to whether the end comes legitimately within the domain of art, and how far that end has been approached.[3]

Taine's "aesthetic science" was relativistic, showing "sympathies for every form of art, and for every school."[4] While American critics similarly manifested interest in diverse artistic aims, they regarded some as more valuable than others.

In the late nineteenth century critics believed that art should be true to nature, but they distinguished art from science by its subjective or poetic content. Earl Shinn described painting as "a translation of nature," saying, "Without there is something of real piercing insight in our copies from nature, they had better not be published. Unless the painter can get at some seldom-observed and essential characteristic of his model ... there is nothing gained, and the world does not become the richer by the contribution."[5] John C. Van Dyke viewed art as a synthesis of three components: idea, subject, and expression. He explained, "The idea is the thought to be conveyed; the subject is the vehicle of conveyance; and the expression is the manner in which it is conveyed."[6] What Van Dyke called the "idea" other art-writers referred to as the "ideal." In both cases, the term referred not to a universal standard of perfection, but to an individual conception of nature's truth and/or beauty. Sylvester Rosa Koehler defined art as "the capacity of men to conceive ideals and to give them shape in such a way as to make them communicable through the senses."[7] It was the ideal element, originating in the painter's imagination, that made art more than a facsimile of nature.

To communicate ideals, critics argued, painters had to master the technical means of expression, those elements of line, *chiaroscuro*, color, brushwork, and composition that gave thoughts and feelings material form. The critics' duty was to read art's language, interpret it for the public, and evaluate the degree to which a painter achieved his or her pictorial aim. The *Art Amateur* explained,

A painter cannot think but in the terms of his art [that is, in forms and colors, brush-strokes and touches of pigment] any more than a writer can without using words and phrases.... A satisfactory critique of a painting then will not speak of it as possessing this or that quality without showing wherein the quality is visible.... It will take into account not only the height of the theme, but the possibility of treating the subject in painting, and then the degree of the artist's success and the skill shown by him in attaining it.[8]

The critical emphasis on technical manner over subject matter suited the empiricism of the age; art-writers viewed the handling of the medium as the tangible manifestation of a painter's mind and heart. Although evaluation of technical accomplishment was by no means the end of criticism, critics believed that a painter's imaginative expression depended on technical skill. By learning to speak the language of art, i.e., learning to paint, American artists would be equipped for individual and national expression.

THE PHILADELPHIA CENTENNIAL EXHIBITION

The critical perception of American art as technically inferior to that of Europe intensified at the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition, the first World's Fair held on New World shores. While the United States demonstrated world leadership in agriculture and industry, the paintings in the art exhibit appeared weak in comparison to European works.[9] Critics praised American painters for their commitment to native subjects but too often found their representations lacking in originality. The inventiveness and newness that characterized the nation's practical achievements did not yet inform the more elevated domain of art.

Critics of the Centennial art exhibit expressed greatest admiration for American landscape painters, who competed successfully for prizes. They preferred the intimate atmospheric works of Sanford Robinson Gifford to the meticulously rendered machines of Frederic Edwin Church. John Ferguson Weir described Church's art as "always attractive and brilliant, but [with] a tendency toward accumulation of detail in lieu of fullness of sentiment."[10] He viewed Gifford's pictures, by comparison, as "interpretation[s] of the profounder sentiments of nature rather than of her superficial aspects." Gifford's art seemed to point to a deeper truth, but the manner of paint handling was similarly detailed and flat. When Susan Nichols Carter observed, "Many of the best of our landscapes appear like pictures seen in the camera,"[11] she identified a fundamental weakness of the American tradition.

With regard to figural subjects, critics praised genre painters for capturing characteristic aspects of American life but found their treatment of this material problematic. Weir viewed Eastman Johnson's work as marred by "uncertainty of form and touch and monotony of tone."[12] Shinn said, "[The] trouble with [Johnson] is ... that he is washy and that it is easy to forget him."[13] While Johnson's technique was, in critics' eyes, too timid, Winslow Homer's was too rude. Weir admired Homer's "grasp upon the essential points of character and natural fact," but perceived his handling as "bald and crude" and lacking substance. Although Johnson and Homer showed genuine affinity for native subjects, their technical deficiencies limited their power of expression.

In comparatively judging the American painting exhibit at the Centennial, critics looked primarily at nineteenth-century French art. This orientation reflected a broader change in taste away from English work, with its literary subjects and photographic realism. Boston collectors had begun purchasing paintings by Barbizon School artists in the 1850s; New Yorkers followed their lead and augmented their French holdings with works by popular academicians. Critics and collectors alike admired the directness and simplicity with which Barbizon artists painted common rural themes, with broad handling of form and attention to tonal relations and outdoor light. Their suggestive technique revealed nature in its totality rather than in detail. It also connoted feeling for the subjects.

Centennial critics set their standards not only according to French painting but also in contrast to popular forms of visual culture. They saw their ambition to compete artistically with Europe threatened by reproductive media of photography and chromolithography, to which American work bore a troublesome resemblance. Although photographs were excluded from the fine arts building, they could be seen at the Centennial in a separate pavilion. The *Atlantic Monthly* disparaged this display as proof that the Fair was an exhibition of "productions of an inartistic age." It added that "the real value of photography for likenesses lies in its being the imprint of life; it is not and never can become an art."[14] An even more abhorrent impediment to the improvement of American art and taste was chromolithography, a process that generated cheap colored reproductions of original oil paintings. From the mid-nineteenth century onward "chromos" ornamented millions of middle-class households and were popularly regarded as fine art. They appeared in the Centennial art exhibit along with paintings, sculptures, and engravings. For genteel art critics, chromos represented everything negative about American civilization: mass production, commercial interest, and cultural naïveté.[15] As material objects, their smooth surfaces, a quality shared with photographs, marked them as mechanical reproductions rather than individual expressions.

With the desire to enter the mainstream of Western tradition came the conviction that American painters should study art, as well as nature, in the original. Critics ascribed the inferiority of American art to lack of technical knowledge, which in their view inhibited full expression of ideals. They blamed the provincial character of American painting on the limited opportunities that were available on native shores. With a few notable exceptions – the Pennsylvania Academy, the New York Art Students League, and the Boston Museum School – classes were taught by drawing masters rather than painters actively engaged in their profession. Art museums, in a fledgling state in the 1870s, contained few European and virtually no Old Master paintings; copies, prints, and casts filled the galleries. A tariff on foreign works of art, raised from ten percent to thirty percent in 1883, perpetuated the dependence on reproductions as a means of improving both art and taste. Spurred by minimal resources, negative criticism, and competitive ambition, American students crossed the Atlantic in ever-increasing numbers to learn to paint.

TO EUROPE AND BACK

Europe presented aspiring artists with endless opportunities and stimulation. Formal instruction was available in government-run academies and private studios. In world-famous museums they could study Old Masters at first hand. Exhibitions of contemporary painting, widely covered in the critical press, kept students abreast of innovations and controversies. The relationships they formed with other painters energized, challenged, and sustained them in their ambition. In 1880, *Scribner's Monthly* reported, "The trip to Europe, for study in the great schools, is an almost universal ideal."[16] The heady combination of schools, museums, exhibitions, galleries, and camaraderie created an "art atmosphere" that American artists could not find at home.

Critics applauded young artists who traveled to Europe for instruction as pioneers in a movement to create a distinctive and accomplished national school. These "new men," in their view, were making a proper beginning by learning the language of art. Benjamin explained, "Imagination is indisputably the first thing in art; the creative faculty dominates all others; ... but in order to come within the domain of art, it must have adequate forms of expression."[17] In 1881 Mariana Griswold van Rensselaer reported, "Technical ability was the first thing to be acquired as a necessary basis for all other excellence if we wished to improve upon our past. Our younger artists have thus gone abroad to seek manual training, that being a thing to be best learned by precept and example, not to be easily evolved from one's own soul."[18] Van Rensselaer and her fellow art-writers viewed technique as a means to an expressive end. Likening technique to a grammar, critics contended it should be learned where it was best taught.

While advocating European training for American artists, late nineteenth-century critics wished ultimately for painting that spoke with a distinctive accent. Benjamin wrote,

> As one of the many means for achieving our art destiny, it behooves us ... to study the arts of other ages and races, for the better apprehension of the principles which underlie art growth. This is doubtless, to some degree, inseparable from the observation of methods, which is, however, quite a different thing from imitating them: every school of good art employs methods of its own.[19]

For Benjamin a principle was a rule for treating an element of art – line, modeling, color, and so forth – whereas a method was an artist's manner of handling these elements. A master's methods invariably informed art education, but the student's goal should be to discern larger principles applicable to all. According to this line of reasoning, American painters could acquire technique abroad without jeopardizing their individual or national points of view.

A view of art education as a sequential process further bolstered critical support for foreign training. The first phase focused on technique, the second constituted a bridge between imitation and innovation. Weir described the process as follows:

> The first period is passed in the school or academy, or in the *atelier* of an artist, while the second is a kind of graduate course wherein larger views prevail and more liberty is allowed – in short, it is a season passed in studying the works of the masters, and in getting an insight of the larger aims of art.[20]

The masters of any age were distinguished not only by their concern with the "larger aims of art," but also by the fact that they had successfully broken conventional rules to realize them. Through studying their achievements, aspiring painters discovered "that art means something more than method, means, or technique"[21] and were inspired to search for their own artistic identities.

Critics viewed national distinction in art as the culmination of a developmental process. Benjamin outlined a series of stages through which painters of all nations must pass:

> First come the feeble, fluttering attempts at articulate language; then imitation of those whose art has the precedence in point of time; then individuality of style or art language; and then the symmetrical equilibrium of a great national life exuberant with thought, colossal in imagination, and wielding styles of expression adequate to the demand of the age.[22]

This concept of artistic progress coincided with a belief that nations, too, evolved, and in so doing became more civilized. As American painters embarked upon a new course, critics greeted their work as the material sign – and the agent – of the nation's cultural progress.

In the years following the Centennial, painters who had learned their technical lessons in foreign studios infused American art exhibitions with new life. A group of returning Munich students made its debut in 1877 at the annual exhibition of the National Academy of Design. Later that year, they joined forces with young Paris-trained painters and older artists in sympathy with their aims to form the Society of American Artists. For the remainder of the century, these two New York-based art organizations mounted rival exhibitions every spring.[23] While artists might exhibit their work with both groups, the Academy gave pride of place to landscape, the Society to figure painting.

Society exhibitions further differed from those of the Academy in their display of technical accomplishment and individuality of methods. Of the younger painters of America, William C. Brownell observed, "[They] have made it their first business to get command of their tools."[24] Van Rensselaer elaborated on this point, saying, "There was no

Fig. 1 William Merritt Chase, American, 1849–1916, *Portrait of the Art Dealer, Otto Fleischman*, ca. 1870–1879. Gift of Dr. Max Hirshler, Bowdoin College Museum of Art

mistaking them among themselves.... Yet there was no denying their brotherhood in art. It was this brotherhood, combined with the individuality of each, that prophesied a new future for American painting."[25] For art-writers, unity of purpose rather than similarity of method constituted the life of a school.

Critics and public alike responded with enthusiasm to the technical panache of work by foreign students, compared to which home productions appeared lifeless and routinized. Of the 1877 Academy exhibition, the *Art Journal* critic wrote,

> A year ago there was a general complaint of the monotony of the pictures, of the tiresome repetitions of familiar subjects, of the great lack of invention and imagination evinced by our painters generally. This season it is as if some magician's wand had been waved over the scene, causing a sudden transformation of monotony into variety, of conventional caution into audacious daring.[26]

As years passed, art critics would discover that learning to paint in Europe had its perils, namely, superficiality, derivativeness, and alienation from one's native land. In the initial flurry of excitement, however, the Society of American Artists held forth the promise of a distinctive and accomplished national school. Clarence Cook later confessed, "The works of the new men were so fresh, so strong, so interesting that, for a time, we did not see their defects, and did not care to see them."[27]

PAINTING PURE AND SIMPLE: WILLIAM MERRITT CHASE

The first American painters to exhibit the benefits of foreign study were trained in Munich, which rivaled Paris in the early 1870s when the French capital was wracked by the Franco-Prussian War.[28] At the Munich Royal Academy, a three-stage curriculum consisted of drawing, elementary painting, and composition. Art students were encouraged to imitate the work of seventeenth-century Dutch masters, notably Rembrandt and Frans Hals. Outside the Academy, a group of artists unofficially led by Wilhelm Leibl drew inspiration from the contemporary French realist Gustave Courbet. Dazzling brushwork and low-life subjects distinguished the work of Munich students such as William Merritt Chase, who galvanized critical interest in 1877.

Chase's *Portrait of the Art Dealer, Otto Fleischman* (Fig. 1) exemplifies the Munich men's bravura approach to figure painting. The vigorous handling of the sitter's visage reflects the Academy's pedagogical emphasis on painting study heads rather than drawing from the nude model. Laid on rapidly and thickly, Chase's rugged paint strokes combined with striking tonal contrasts and patches of pure color bespeak direct observation and quick response. From a distance, Fleischman's personality projects powerfully; at close range, the paint handling becomes an object of interest on its own. To some American art-writers Chase's manner appeared rough and even ugly, but they admired the "facility and swiftness" that imbued his canvases with *élan*. Brownell, for one, explained,

"They attract, stimulate, provoke a real enthusiasm at times for their straightforward directness, their singleness of aim, their absolute avoidance of all sentimentality."[29] What Chase lacked in feeling for his subjects he atoned for by feeling for the picturesque.

Chase returned to America in 1878 and became a celebrity in the New York art world. In his lavishly decorated Tenth Street studio, the deft technician developed into a brilliant eclectic, drawing freely from Dutch and Spanish Old Masters, the Aesthetic movement, and French Impressionism. Van Rensselaer identified variety as Chase's most marked characteristic and noted, "There is so little sameness in his work that we are for a moment unable to form a distinct idea of his individuality, further than that he is a very strong painter and a hater of shams and sentimentalities."[30] Van Rensselaer praised Chase's ability to render common subjects in a manner appealing to the eye. "If Mr. Chase has not the idealizing imagination," she wrote, "he has the *artistic* imagination which can so treat prosaic facts that they become, without any loss of actuality, fit subjects for treatment by the ablest brush."[31] Chase could, in a word, convert mundane material into the stuff of art.

Critics looking for expression of thought and feeling, however, repeatedly accused Chase of superficiality. Speaking of *In the Studio* (The Brooklyn Museum), a paean to material aestheticism, Benjamin observed, "He has versatility sufficient to represent whatever appears to his eye. But he is deficient in imagination and his nature revels in externals rather than in what they suggest."[32] For other art-writers, Chase's superficiality extended beyond his subject matter to his artistic aim. The *Art Amateur* critic wrote, "His technique is very nearly its all in all. Its purpose is essentially painting."[33] Not until the late 1880s, when Chase began painting small Impressionist scenes of Central Park, did critics begin to praise his work as "charming," and credit him with "discovering" the beauty of the local scene.[34] He would never, however, entirely disabuse them of the opinion that his genius lay primarily in his facility with paint.

SCIENTIFIC REALISM: THOMAS EAKINS

While American critics initially lavished praise on the Munich-trained painters, their hopes for a distinctive and accomplished national school soon shifted to artists who had learned their technical lessons in France.[35] Foremost among these in the 1870s and early 1880s was Thomas Eakins, who began his art education at the Pennsylvania Academy. In 1866 Eakins sailed for Paris and matriculated at the government-run École des Beaux-Arts, where the curriculum centered on figure drawing. Students at the École learned to paint in the atelier of an academician, and Eakins chose the popular teacher Jean-Léon Gérôme. He rounded out Gérôme's academic instruction with study under the sculptor August Dumont and the Spanish portraitist Léon Bonnat.[36] Upon returning to Philadelphia in 1870 Eakins established a reputation as both an artist and a teacher.

Critical admiration for Eakins's early work derived from his application of European technique to American subject matter in its noble aspects. Writing of watercolors such as *Baseball Players Practicing* (Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design), Earl Shinn said,

> The most admirable figure studies ... for pure natural force and virility are those of Mr. Eakins in which the method of Gérôme is applied to subjects the antipodes of those affected by the French realist.... The selection of the themes in itself shows artistic insight, for American sporting life is the most Olympian, beautiful, and genuine side of its civilization from the plastic point of view.[37]

Whereas Gérôme had turned to history and the Orient for his subjects, Eakins focused on the real life that surrounded him. Eakins's originality lay not only in his American themes, however, but also in the scientific underpinnings of his art. Along with traditional techniques of painting, study of perspective, anatomy, and photography informed his pictures and heightened the effect of realism. In his first review of Eakins's watercolors Shinn introduced the artist to the public as "a realist, an anatomist, and a mathematician."[38] By the end of the 1870s, he distinguished Eakins as "one of the very few French students who have developed an independent American style since their return."[39]

While American art-writers praised Eakins's early pictures they were increasingly skeptical of his scientism. As professor and subsequently director of the Pennsylvania Academy, he made painting from the nude model the centerpiece of instruction; drawing was de-emphasized in favor of anatomy supplemented by dissection. In an 1879 interview

Fig. 2 Thomas Eakins, American, 1844–1916, *Singing a Pathetic Song*, 1881. Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Eakins explained to William C. Brownell, "No one dissects to quicken his eye for, or his delight in, beauty. He dissects simply to increase his knowledge of how beautiful objects are put together to the end that he may be able to imitate them." While acknowledging Eakins's aims, Brownell found that his interest in accurately depicting facts of nature obviated individual thought or feeling. Brownell wrote, "[Eakins's] realism, though powerful, lacks charm.... He is too skeptical concerning the invisible forces that lie around us."[40] In critical parlance, "charm" derived from a painter's imaginative engagement with a subject; it was art's capacity to enlarge the viewer's imagination that distinguished it from science.

Critics looked more favorably on Eakins's scientific method when he applied it to inherently sentimental themes. In 1881 he won high praise for *Singing a Pathetic Song* (Fig. 2), which he exhibited at the National Academy. This low-toned image of a home musicale struck a responsive chord in almost all its viewers. Brownell, who had previously found Eakins's art lacking in imagination, saw *Singing a Pathetic Song* as a notable exception. He wrote, "The sensuous and sentimental note ... is left out of Mr. Eakins's art, and in many of his pictures its absence leaves a void which no attempt is made to fill. But here the matter is too high for such considerations.... All the 'intolerable pathos' of a song of Burns is what is felt."[41] In depicting the concentrated character of the performance, Eakins spared no detail of the singer's homely features and rumpled clothes. In so doing, he also demonstrated his mastery of technique. Praising Eakins's unique combination of honesty and artistry, Van Rensselaer declared,

> Of all American artists, he is the most typically national, the most devoted to the actual life about him, the most given to rendering it without gloss or alteration. That life is often ugly in its manifestations, no doubt, [but] his artistic skill is such that he can bring good results from the most unpromising materials.[42]

When Eakins's subjects were laden with emotion, critics were willing to excuse his lack of idealization.

Singing a Pathetic Song was, however, an exception. A few months earlier, Eakins had elicited unanimously negative response when he exhibited *The Fairman Rogers Four-in Hand* (Philadelphia Museum of Art) at the Philadelphia Society of American Artists. Spirited in concept and bright in color, the painting shows the Pennsylvania Academy's board chairman driving family and friends through Fairmount Park on a May morning. To help him accurately depict the movement of the trotting horses, Eakins had dissected horses and used Eadweard Muybridge's photographs of animal locomotion. Both in spite of and because of this process, the work impressed contemporary art-writers as lifeless. With regard to Eakins's use of photography, Van Rensselaer distinguished between knowledge and appearance of a subject. She wrote, "No amount of knowledge on the subject will ever teach our eyes to see a horse with three feet poised in the air ... Art is not for the scientifically-instructed mind but for the eye which sees optically...."[43] Koehler cast the problem in more

general terms when he said, "As a demonstration of the fact that the artist must fail when he attempts to depict what *is*, instead of what *seems to be*, this picture is of great value."[44] Eakins's realism may have been true to science, but critics ultimately found it false to art.

COSMOPOLITAN STYLE: JOHN SINGER SARGENT

American artists who followed in the footsteps of Chase and Eakins increasingly learned lessons outside government-run academies. The most prodigious talent of the period, John Singer Sargent received his artistic training first in Florence and subsequently in Paris in the private studio of Carolus-Duran.[45] Carolus-Duran's teaching method differed from that of academicians affiliated with the École des Beaux-Arts insofar as he encouraged painting directly from the living model, without preliminary drawing. This *alla prima* approach suited Sargent perfectly, and he soon won fame, fortune, and some notoriety for portraits of international high society.

Critics compared Sargent's early portraiture to that of Chase, noting the strength of each painter's technique.[46] At the third Society of American Artists exhibition, they saw Chase's *Portrait of James Watson Webb* (Shelburne Museum) and Sargent's *Portrait of Carolus-Duran* (Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute) as representative, respectively, of America and France. Benjamin defined the formal difference between the two by saying: "The rugged force of Mr. Chase's style is in Mr. Sargent's replaced by a handling which, although bold, is yet delicate."[47] Sargent's suavely executed tribute (and arguably challenge) to his master was in Van Rensselaer's eyes, "French through and through, French no less in the technique … than in its feeling and its meaning as a work of art."[48] She judged Chase's "nervous, restless" brushwork a bit more valuable; though originating in his Munich training, it accorded with the American character of his subject.

As Sargent moved beyond Carolus-Duran's teaching, critics concerned themselves less with nationality and more with the depth of his artistic vision. Writing of *The Lady with the Rose (Charlotte Louise Burckhardt)* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) in 1883 Van Rensselaer observed, "He is immensely clever, this young man, whether he will rank among the *great* painters of our time seems to depend only upon the question whether he will show himself possessed of more soul, of more individuality of feeling than he has as yet revealed."[49] Van Rensselaer demurred from judging Sargent's work as superficial, yet she finally conceded that he represented the "society" self rather than the truer self of his portrait subjects:

> Never, so far as I have seen does Mr. Sargent paint his models superficially in the sense of painting the mere surface and semblance of a human being without indicating that anything to be called an individual soul lies beneath. But sometimes he paints them superficially in the sense of painting one of the soul's most superficial phases.[50]

Albeit lacking in interpretive depth, Sargent's portraits, in Van Rensselaer's eyes, imbued his subjects with "high-bred refinement and interesting personalities." Critics saw in them an air of good breeding shared by the artist himself.

In 1887–88 Sargent made his first working trip to the United States, a tour that expanded his patronage among the American elite. He painted portraits in New York, Newport, and Boston, and showed them at Boston's St. Botolph Club in his first one-man exhibition. *Portrait of Elizabeth Nelson Fairchild* (Fig. 3) exemplifies, on a small scale, Sargent's characteristic blend of technical freedom and refinement. With consummate confidence and minimal means, he distinguishes textures of flesh and fur and fabric, moving as he does so from depth to surface and from warm to cool. Critics praised the directness of Sargent's approach and his ability to render perceptions in a single masterly stroke. Like the Old Masters he admired, most notably Velázquez, he achieved in painting a lifelikeness that academic practice typically destroyed. The *Art Amateur* critic defined the greatest art as "that which preserves the vivacity of the first sketch and the suavity of the finished drawing together, the luminousness of the untormented color and the evenness of the well mixed tints."[51] From the masters Sargent learned principles of art that led him beyond imitation of foreign methods.

As an artist Sargent's distinction lay in technical manner more than in ideas or feelings about his subject matter. His portraits displayed great inventiveness of composition and a rapid yet elegant handling of paint. Speaking of the St. Botolph Club exhibition, the *Boston Evening Transcript*

Fig. 3 John Singer Sargent, American, 1856–1925,
Portrait of Elizabeth Nelson Fairchild, 1887. Museum Purchase,
George Otis Hamlin Fund and Friends of the College Fund,
Bowdoin College Museum of Art

Fig. 4 Theodore Robinson, American, 1852–1896, *Angelus*, ca. 1879. Bequest of Mr. and Mrs. Nevil Ford, Colby College Museum of Art, Waterville, Maine

declared, "No American has ever displayed a collection of paintings ... having so much of the quality which is summed up in the world *style*.... Nothing is commonplace; nothing is conventional. The personal note is always felt."[52] Sargent's individuality transcended national boundaries, making him a painter America would claim but never fully own.

SYNTHETIC NATURALISM: THEODORE ROBINSON

Portraiture had long held a place of prominence in American art, but late nineteenth-century critics looked for broader achievement in figure painting as a requisite for a national school. Benjamin wrote,

> Until a knowledge of the figure has become almost traditionally familiar to our artists, it is impossible for us to hope for any important general results in either *genre* or historical painting. Nor can such art be thoroughly national or original until sufficient time has elapsed to imbue our artists ... with the characteristics of the mental and physical race types which are being evolved on this continent.[53]

Eakins had applied his technical knowledge to American figure subjects, but a majority of Paris-trained students who followed him preferred to paint picturesque types they found abroad. During the hot summer months, they fled the city for rural art colonies near the forest of Fontainebleau and the coasts of Brittany and Normandy. Here they came into contact with French realists and impressionists whose technique derived from direct observation of nature. This encounter served to temper the instruction they had received in Parisian ateliers.

Theodore Robinson's *Angelus* (Fig. 4) manifests the synthesis of academic and modern methods characteristic of painters who came to be called American impressionists. As a student, Robinson availed himself of diverse opportunities, in New York at the National Academy and subsequently in Paris with both Carolus-Duran and Gérôme. Gérôme taught him to draw the figure; Carolus-Duran to paint directly from the model, a practice that transitioned easily to *plein air* work in landscape. Robinson's image of a French peasant girl, probably painted at Grez-sur-Loing near Barbizon, displays his mastery of alternative approaches to making art. The combination of clearly contoured figure, loosely painted background, and silvery tonality invites comparison to the naturalism of French artists like Jules Bastien-Lepage, though Robinson's work conveys more tender feeling.

The peasant was a favorite subject of both European naturalists and foreign-trained Americans; art-writers persistently exhorted the latter to come home and turn their attention to the local scene. While the New World might appear

ugly in the sense of being crude or commonplace, in critics' eyes it abounded in possibilities for artistic innovation. In 1886, Van Rensselaer wrote,

> Our new material is at home – we go abroad merely to find what is old and hackneyed; and the measure savors, not of ambition, but of pusillanimity. We paint French peasants and Dutch maidens and German boors, not because they are good and virgin subjects, but, on the contrary, because they are easier to paint since so many men have already shown us how.[54]

Time spent abroad threatened not only to turn native talents into foreign imitators, but also to destroy their sympathy for the American scene. Benjamin observed,

> It is not uncommon to hear young artists who have studied in the ateliers of Paris or Munich ... complaining that they find no sources of inspiration here, no subjects to paint at home.... [The] difficulty lies not in the lack of subjects, but in the way the artist has learned to look at things, and the range of sympathies to which he has become accustomed by his foreign experiences.[55]

These critical concerns about foreign training were borne out in an 1883 letter from Robinson to Kenyon Cox, in which he reported, "I have nearly got rid of the desire to do 'American things' – mostly because American life is so unpaintable – and a higher kind of art seems to be to exclude the questions of nationality."[56] Art-writers seeking a distinctive American school of art found such abrogation of birthright profoundly troubling.

SKILLFUL IMITATION: GARI MELCHERS

While critics lamented the alienation of foreign-trained Americans from their homeland, these artists increasingly won international acclaim abroad. At the 1889 International Exposition in Paris John Singer Sargent and Gari Melchers received *grands prix* for figure paintings that spanned the gamut from society portraiture to peasant genre.[57] Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer ranked the American display second only to that of France in terms of interest and promise. Brownell reported proudly that American artists had definitely "learned how to paint."[58]

Melchers's *The Sermon* (Fig. 5) exemplified the capacity of American artists to conceive large-scale figural compositions and paint them with technical sophistication. Like Robinson, Melchers had an eclectic art education, beginning at the Royal Academy in Düsseldorf, where he learned to draw and model, and continuing at the Académie Julian in Paris, where he developed a looser style of paint handling. Founded to prepare students to compete for places at L'École, Julian's private academy offered both men and women an opportunity to work from the living model and receive occasional criticism from academicians. Melchers also painted in rural areas of France and later Holland, where he established a studio in the town of Egmond-aan-Zee. There he made Dutch peasant life his signature subject in images that combined specific detail and natural light.

Honored by judges yet faulted by critics, *The Sermon* conveyed with honesty, skill, and a touch of humor, the earnest religiosity of the Egmond folk. The picture received an honorable mention at the 1886 Paris Salon, where it was first exhibited, and a gold medal at the 1888 International Exposition in Munich. At the 1889 Paris fair, Theodore Child described Melchers's paintings as "full of character, studded with *esprit*, drawn faultlessly, and painted with simplicity and strength."[59] In Child's opinion, however, the artist's technical ability was wasted on a subject that by this time had become conventional.

Many art-writers found American painters like Melchers technically derivative and for this reason lacking in profundity. British critic Claude Phillips commented,

> What modern American practitioners of art ... possess is a marvelous imitative and assimilative power, with much daintiness and facile charm of execution in the recent modes.... Seeing the things which they attempt to reproduce mainly from the outside, they fail to interpret them with that inner truth which is an essential element of all higher and more enduring art.[60]

In Phillips's view, American artists had become skilled in drawing, modeling, color, brushwork, and composition, but individual ideas and feelings, which required them to inflect their technical language, must originate from within. Back home, Koehler faulted the new movement for being driven by an ambition that was competitive rather than expressive. Retrospectively he observed, "We saw others doing better, and were stung to emulation. We did not fashion our own

Fig. 5 Gari Melchers, American, 1860–1932, *The Sermon*, 1886. Bequest of Henry Ward Ranger through the National Academy of Design, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.

tools, and learn how to use them by our own intellectual efforts. We borrowed the tools from others and had them teach us how to handle them."[61] On the road to mastering technique, American painters seemed to have arrived at an imaginative dead end.

Brownell concurred that expression of ideals was the end of art, but he continued to look favorably on the progress of the young Americans. Turning the critical tables, he accused modern French painters, i.e., the Impressionists, of excessive focus on the technique or "machinery" of art and presenting a "scientific" view of nature. "They show you how nature looks to you, if you have looked closely at her manifestations. What *they* think and feel, how *they* are impressed seems a matter of no importance. Their art is objectively reduced to system, and consequently to artistic barrenness."[62] Brownell defended the imitativeness of American painters by reiterating the argument that they were still at an early stage of a developmental process. He maintained, "Originality in art demands art before originality."[63] Brownell noted further, "French critics who object to their cleverness in imitation modestly forget that it is difficult to paint well nowadays without imitating the French *plein-air* painting." Since Americans had first traveled to Europe for instruction, the definition of technical accomplishment had come to include ability to represent effects of natural light. Van Rensselaer described this problem as "the most modern and most difficult [of all]."[64] In the process of solving it, American artists would refocus their attention on distinctively American themes.

A LAW UNTO HIMSELF: WINSLOW HOMER

While the process of learning to paint abroad could lead to loss of nationality, late nineteenth-century critics found American character expressed by home-based artists who espoused a more modern approach to art. Among figure painters, the outstanding exemplar of Americanness in the 1880s was Winslow Homer, whose technical method eluded categorization with any particular school. Homer was essentially a self-taught artist; his formal education consisted of an apprenticeship with a Boston lithographer and a few lessons in drawing and painting during his early days in New York. Although he made two trips to Europe, one to France in 1867 and a second to England in 1881, he did not enroll in a course of academic training but chose instead to learn through observation. In Europe Homer looked closely at the work of other artists, gravitating toward the poetic realism of Jean-François Millet, the decorative abstraction of Japanese prints, and the timeless classicism of Greek sculpture. American

Fig. 6 Winslow Homer, American, 1836–1910, *Undertow*, 1886. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts/ The Bridgeman Art Library

critics recognized these diverse influences on his art yet perceived none to be as dominant as that of nature.

Throughout Homer's career, critics viewed devotion to nature as his most distinctive characteristic. In contrast to American painters who had studied formally in Munich and Paris, they described Homer as a dedicated pupil of "nature's school." Shinn said, "We always think of Mr. Homer when we feel hopeful of the uprising of a national expression in art.... He selects purely national subjects, and he paints them with a style quite his own, a style that has never felt the style of foreign teachers to a controlling point."[65] While critics admired Homer's independence, they found his expression inhibited by a crude technique. Of *Breezing Up* (National Gallery of Art, Washington), Homer's submission to the National Academy exhibition in 1876, the *Art Journal* critic wrote,

> Mr. Homer is always perplexing. There are so much truth and vigour in his compositions that one can but admire them; and yet half-expressed thoughts, strange eccentricities of drawing, rude handling of material, seriously offset the charm of his undeniable fresh and usually truthful themes.[66]

Critics viewed Homer's early paintings as sketches, full of life and character, but artistically "incomplete."[67]

This perception changed in 1883 after Homer returned from two years in Cullercoats, England, a small fishing village on the North Sea coast. In a group of large watercolors, he showed the sea not as a setting for leisurely activities, but as a player in a drama of survival. Homer's technique grew more studied as his subject matter grew more grave. His lines became graceful and rhythmic, and figures were modeled with a solidity that made them appear statuesque as well as lifelike. Of Homer's English watercolors Van Rensselaer enthused, "His four pictures were no longer sketches or studies, but pictures in the truest sense of the word.... They were powerful, both in their originality, and in the sort of dignified beauty they secured."[68] Acknowledging Homer's debt to foreign art, in this case, the Parthenon marbles, the *Nation* critic commented, "He is not an imitator of any prevailing style; but he appears to have studied the best art understandingly and to good purpose, while he has retained an independent feeling for nature from which he draws inspiration."[69] By maintaining his direct relationship with nature, Homer had avoided falling into imitation.

Back in America Homer applied his newfound skill in picture-making to subjects taken from modern life. *Undertow* (Fig. 6), exhibited at the National Academy in 1887, was based on a rescue the artist had witnessed years earlier in Atlantic

City. Van Rensselaer extolled the painting's rare combination of grace and power, noting specifically "... the almost Greek way in which [the lines] express active effort without destruction of unity or repose."[70] In her eyes, Homer's work was proof that "realism need not mean the death of *pictorial* idealism, truth need not mean ugliness, local themes need not mean the exclusion of grace of form, any more than the exclusion of charm of color."[71] Homer had finally succeeded in giving American life and character a unified pictorial form.

Critics likened other aspects of *Undertow* to contemporary European art. The intense blue-green color reminded them of French Impressionist painting, which had been shown in New York the previous year by art dealer Durand-Ruel. Commenting on this similarity, Van Rensselaer attributed it not to imitation of foreign methods but to a shared approach to painting nature. "When men really study out-door effects with a really fresh and open eye," she explained, "their interpretations of it will often have much in common."[72] To viewers who questioned Homer's blue shadows on wet flesh, she cited the artist's working method as proof of their accuracy. "Before you call these colors unnatural, remember that this artist ... lives his life on the shores of Maine, and that living his life means solely and only this: Observing natural effects and striving to represent them with the most patient skill."[73] Although Van Rensselaer found the color scheme of *Undertow* bold, and a little crude, she maintained that it was true to natural appearances.

Art-writers' admiration for Homer's truthfulness led them to forgive weaknesses of his technique. William A. Coffin said of *Undertow*, "Though not remarkable for powerful drawing nor for any especially beautiful quality of color, this picture has a force about it, an air of truth, and a fine sculpturesque quality of modeling, that puts it far beyond the ordinary well-done sort of work."[74] The visual impact of Homer's mature painting challenged critical concepts of technical accomplishment. Writing of the English watercolors, Van Rensselaer had posited a connection between untutored methods and expressive power, saying,

> He has worked out his technical manners for himself.... The results ... are unscholarly, perhaps, but extremely original, and also forcible and clearly expressive of what he has to say.... Perhaps it is *because* of his *naïveté*, his occasional *gaucheries*, ... and not in spite of these things, that his handling seems so fresh, so unaffected, so peculiarly his own, so well adapted to the nature of the feeling it reveals.[75]

In contrast to Eakins, his fellow realist, Homer painted nature not as it was known scientifically, but as it appeared visually to the man behind the brush. For late nineteenth-century critics, his technical independence exemplified American character, but placed him outside the trajectory of a national school.

THE WORLD'S COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION

The faith in developmental progress, which had sustained art critics since the Centennial Exhibition, met its test at the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893. A total of 21 million people visited Chicago's "White City," whose classical vocabulary signaled the nation's coming of age. Expatriate painters had dominated the American art section at the 1889 exposition, but on home ground organizers presented a more fully representative display.[76] Quadruple the size of the Paris exhibit, it contained landscape, portraiture, genre, history painting, and ideal work. The dominant impression produced was one of diversity, but not disharmony. In the variety of subjects and methods, critics saw proof that American painters were cultivating their individualities.

Artists singled out by critics for extended comment were those with the most distinctive styles. Led by George Inness, American landscape painters had abandoned the theatrical and detailed Hudson River School aesthetic for a quietly suggestive tonalist idiom. A late painting by Inness, *The Valley on a Gloomy Day* (Fig. 7), presents a poetic intimation of nature's underlying spirit. Material reality dissipates in loose brushwork and diaphanous color, which simultaneously bespeak and invite deeper contemplation. Inness, like Homer, was an essentially self-taught painter whose technique elicited critical praise and blame. While admiring his treatment of light and color, art-writers often saw weakness in drawing and composition. Nonetheless, in 1893 Coffin declared of landscapes by Inness and his followers, "No pictures show more conclusively ... that America artists are making steady and rapid progress in individual expression."[77] Van Dyke claimed chauvinistically, "As regards landscape [our pictorial view] is the best one now extant in the schools, and it has

Fig. 7 George Inness, American, 1825–1894, *The Valley on a Gloomy Day*, 1892. Gift of Thomas J. Watson, Jr., Colby College Museum of Art, Waterville, Maine

little or nothing to gain from the view of others."[78] Landscape remained a field in which Americans achieved distinction with methods derived from direct observation.

With regard to figure painting, where American art had appeared most deficient in 1876, Sargent and Homer shared honors for fashionable portraits and heroic marines. Coffin contrasted the two in terms of their artistic education. Of the former he said,

> Sargent had been thoroughly trained in academic courses before attempting to paint a picture at all, and ... as his facility increased and his artistic perception grew more personal, [he] developed a style that is irreproachable from the technical standpoint, and marvelous in directness, simplicity, and harmony of form and color.[79]

While Sargent's art was built on technical training, Homer's originated in personal temperament. Coffin continued,

> Mr. Homer, with the slightest academical training, but endowed with a temperament that led him to see years ago what other men around him failed to see, and to persevere in his attempts to express what he felt were the great truths in nature, has progressed steadily from a tentative, somewhat uncouth, but always forcible manner to a masterly breadth of treatment and intensely personal style....

Although markedly differing in technique, Sargent and Homer had similarly synthesized traditional and modern influences and adapted the language of art to suit their visions of their worlds. Their paintings would spawn countless imitations, but as artists both would remain individual to the core.

For the seed of a national school of art, critics looked not at these older individualists, but at painters who had studied abroad and returned to work at home. They cited specifically Edmund C. Tarbell in figure painting and John Twachtman in landscape. With less force and more refinement than the previous generation, American impressionists were developing equally personal means to express ideals. Coffin observed,

> The excellence of the American exhibit of paintings in Chicago, so far as the work shown by artists who live at home is concerned ... is the direct outcome of the efforts of the younger men in New York and Boston to express with technical methods of their own, founded on the principles taught in the Paris schools, what they have seen and felt in their native surroundings.[80]

Van Dyke predicted that, in the future, allegiance to American subject matter would distinguish American art. He said,

> Added individualities ... produce nationality in art when there is homogeneity in fundamental thought and aim.... That there is to be great production in painting in this country during the next quarter of a century is almost a foregone conclusion, and it cannot be doubted that our painters will find American life their strongest inspiration.[81]

Having been united by a desire to acquire European technique, American painters could achieve their promise by a shared commitment to American subjects.

At the Columbian Exposition, the vision of late nineteenth-century art critics appeared about to be fulfilled. Having mastered technique and begun to give form to individual ideals, American artists seemed poised collectively to create a national school. The road they had traveled to this end had not been a straight one. Along the way critics had praised, faulted, encouraged, and chided, yet never ceased to believe in the primary importance of learning to paint. In the decades that followed, American painters would expand their horizons beyond impressionist images of modern life to allegorical mural projects, gritty urban genre, and ultimately abstractions, all the while maintaining a dialogue with European art. Art education would break further away from the traditional academic model in response to pictorial innovation, technological innovation, and cultural change. Exhibitions would become more numerous as museums developed their contemporary collections, commercial art galleries multiplied as a vehicle for sales, and like-minded groups of artists banded together to promote their ideas. Through it all, critics would continue the cultural work begun in the late nineteenth century: to interpret, support, and guide the progress of American art.

Notes

1. John C. Van Dyke, *How to Judge of a Picture* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1889; Cincinnati: Jennings & Pye, 1889), 15–16.

2. "Art Criticism," *Scribner's Monthly* 18, no. 1 (May 1879): 135–36.

3. Samuel Greene Wheeler Benjamin, "Art Criticism," *Art Journal* (New York), n.s. 5 (January 1879): 30.

4. Hippolyte Taine, *The Philosophy of Art*, trans. John Durand (London: H. Baillière, 1865), 21.

5. Earl Shinn [Edward Strahan], *The Masterpieces of the Centennial International Exhibition*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Gebbie & Barrie, 1876), 272–73.

6. John C. Van Dyke, *Principles of Art* (New York: Fords, Howard, & Hulbert, 1887), 136.

7. Sylvester Rosa Koehler, *American Art* (New York: Cassell & Co., 1886; reprint ed., New York: Garland Publishing, 1978), 15.

8. "Picture Criticism," *Art Amateur* 13, no. 3 (August 1885): 46.

9. On the Centennial art exhibit, see *1876: American Art of the Centennial*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1976).

10. John Ferguson Weir, "Plastic and Graphic Art. Painting and Sculpture," in Francis A. Walker, ed., *International Exhibition, 1876. Reports and Awards*, vol. 7, groups 21–27 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880), 632.

11. Susan Nichols Carter, "Paintings at the Centennial Exhibition," *Art Journal* (New York), n.s. 2 (September 1876): 284–85.

12. Weir, "Plastic and Graphic Art," 635.

13. Earl Shinn, "The International Exhibition.—x1. American Art.—11," *Nation* 23, no. 579 (August 3, 1876): 72.

14. "Characteristics of the International Fair. v1. Closing Days," *Atlantic Monthly* 39, no. 231 (January 1877): 94.

15. On the debate surrounding chromolithography, see Sarah Burns and John Davis, eds., *American Art to 1900: A Documentary History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 896–902.

16. William H. Bishop, "Young Artists' Life in New York," *Scribner's Monthly* 19, no. 3 (January 1880): 358.

17. Samuel Greene Wheeler Benjamin, "Tendencies of Art in America" in Walter Montgomery, ed., *American Art and American Art Collections*, 2 vols. (Boston: E. W. Walker & Co., 1889; reprint ed., New York: Garland Publishing, 1978), 2:994.

18. Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer, "The New York Art Season," *Atlantic Monthly* 48, no. 286 (August 1881): 193–94.

19. Samuel Greene Wheeler Benjamin, *Contemporary Art in Europe* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877; reprint ed., New York: Garland Publishing, 1976), 7–8.

20. John Ferguson Weir, "Art Study at Home and Abroad," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 66, no. 396 (May 1883): 947.

21. Ibid., 950.

22. Benjamin, "Tendencies of Art in America," in Montgomery, 2:994.

23. See Trudie A. Grace, "The National Academy of Design and the Society of American Artists: Rivals Viewed by Critics, 1878–1906," in David B. Dearinger, ed., *Rave Reviews: American Art and Its Critics, 1826–1925*, exh. cat. (New York: National Academy of Design, 2000), 107–121.

24. William C. Brownell, "The Younger Painters of America," *Scribner's Monthly* 20 (May 1880): 6.

25. Van Rensselaer, "William Merritt Chase," in Montgomery, 1:210.

26. "The Academy Exhibition," *Art Journal* (New York), n.s. 3 (May 1877): 157.

27. Clarence Cook, "Art in America in 1883," *The Princeton Review* 59 (May 1883): 312.

28. On American artists in Munich, see Richard V. West, *Munich and American Realism in the Nineteenth Century*, exh. cat. (Sacramento: E. B. Crocker Art Gallery, 1978).

29. Brownell, "The Younger Painters of America," *Scribner's Monthly* 20, no. 1 (May 1880): 14.

30.Van Rensselaer, "William Merritt Chase," in Montgomery, 1:224.

31. Ibid., 1:229.

32. Benjamin, "The Exhibitions. v11. —Society of American Artists. Fourth Annual Exhibition," *American Art Review* 2, no. 2 (June 1881): 73.

33. Greta, "Art in Boston. William Merritt Chase's Exhibition," *Art Amateur* 16, no. 2 (January 1887): 28.

34. For critical response to Chase's paintings of Central Park, see Burns and Davis, 983–84.

35. The definitive work on this subject is H. Barbara Weinberg, *The Lure of Paris: Nineteenth-Century American Painters and Their French Masters* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991). Unless otherwise specified, all information on Parisian academies and ateliers is taken from this source. For additional information on late nineteenth-century Americans artists' experience in France, see Kathleen Adler, Erica E. Hirshler, and H. Barbara Weinberg, *Americans in Paris, 1860–1900*, exh. cat. (London: National Gallery Company Limited, 2006).

36. See H. Barbara Weinberg, "Studies in Paris and Spain," in Darrel Sewell, *Thomas Eakins*, exh. cat. (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2002), 13–26.

37. [Earl Shinn], "Fine Arts. The Water-Color Society's Exhibition—II," *Nation* 20, no. 503 (February 18, 1875): 120.

38. [Shinn], "Notes," *Nation* 18, no. 454 (March 12, 1874): 172.

39. [Shinn], "Fine Arts. The Fifty-Fourth Exhibition of the Academy of Design—II," *Nation* 28, no. 725 (May 22, 1879): 359.

40. Brownell, "The Art Schools of Philadelphia," *Scribner's Monthly* 28, no. 5 (September 1879): 743–50.

41. Brownell, "Fourth Annual Exhibition of the Society of American Artists," *Nation* 32 (April 7, 1881): 250.

42. Van Rensselaer, "The New York Art Season," *Atlantic Monthly* 48, no. 286 (August 1881): 198–99.

43. Van Rensselaer, "The Philadelphia Exhibition.—II," *American Architect and Building News* 8, no. 261 (December 25, 1880): 303.

44. Sylvester Rosa Koehler, "The Exhibitions. III.—Second Annual Exhibition of the Philadelphia Society of Artists," *American Art Review* 2 (January 1881): 109.

45. See H. Barbara Weinberg, "Sargent and Carolus-Duran," in Marc Simpson, *Uncanny Spectacle: The Public Career of the Young John Singer Sargent*, exh. cat. (New Haven: Yale University Press; Williamstown: The Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1997), 5–29.

46. For an overview of Sargent's early critical reputation, see Marc Simpson, "Sargent and His Critics," in Simpson, *Uncanny Spectacle*, 31–69.

47. Benjamin, "The Exhibitions. IV.—Society of American Artists. Third Exhibition," *American Art Review* 1 (April 1880): 260.

48. Van Rensselaer, "Spring Exhibitions and Picture Sales in New York.—I," *American Architect and Building News* 7, no. 227 (May 1, 1880): 190.

49. Van Rensselaer, "Spring Exhibitions in New York.—I," *American Architect and Building News* 13, no. 383 (April 28, 1883): 196.

50. Van Rensselaer, "Pictures of the Season in New York.—VI," *American Architect and Building News* 20, no. 552 (July 24, 1886): 42.

51. Montezuma [Montague Marks], "Art for Artists," *Art Amateur* 2, no. 5 (April 1880): 90.

52. *Boston Evening Transcript* (January 20, 1888): 4. Quoted in Trevor J. Fairbrother, *John Singer Sargent and America* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc. 1986), 109. Style was a word often used, but vaguely defined by late nineteenth-century critics. Benjamin defined it as "the proper, effective use of these media [line, chiaro-scuro, and color] based on intelligent observation." See "Tendencies of Art in America," in Montgomery, 2:994.

53. Benjamin, "Tendencies of Art in America," in Montgomery, 2:997.

54. Van Rensselaer, "Pictures of the Season in New York.—IV," *American Architect and Building News*, 19, no. 547 (June 19, 1886): 293.

55. Benjamin, *Art in America: A Critical and Historical Sketch* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1880), 119.

56. Theodore Robinson to Kenyon Cox, New York, May 31, 1883, Kenyon Cox Papers, Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University. Quoted in Weinberg, *The Lure of Paris*, 212.

57. On the 1889 fair, see Annette Blaugrund, *Paris 1889: American Artists at the Universal Exposition*, exh. cat. (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1989).

58. William C. Brownell, "The Paris Exposition: Notes and Impressions," *Scribner's Magazine* 7, no. 1 (January 1890): 33.

59. Theodore Child, "American Artists at the Paris Exposition," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 79, no. 472 (September 1889): 510.

60. Claude Phillips, "The Modern Schools of Painting and Sculpture, as Illustrated by the 'Grands Prix' at the Paris Exhibition. Great Britain and the United States of America." *Magazine of Art* 14, no. 6 (May 1891): 208–09.

61. Koehler, *American Art*, 12.

62. Brownell, "The Paris Exposition. Notes and Impressions," *Scribner's Magazine* 7, no. 1 (January 1890): 32.

63. Ibid., 33.

64. Van Rensselaer, "The Fourteenth Exhibition of the Society of American Artists," *Harper's Weekly* 36, no. 1847 (May 14, 1892): 470.

65. [Shinn], "Fine Arts. The National Academy Exhibition. Final Notice," *Nation* 26, no. 674 (May 30, 1878): 363.

66. "The National Academy of Design. Second Notice," *Art Journal* (New York), n.s. 2 (June 1876): 190.

67. On Homer's early critical reception, see Margaret C. Conrads, *Winslow Homer and the Critics: Forging a National Art in the 1870s*, exh. cat. (Princeton: Princeton University Press in association with the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Mo., 2001).

68. Van Rensselaer, "The Water-Color Exhibition, New York," *American Architect and Building News* 13, no. 378 (March 24, 1883): 138.

69. "Fine Arts. Water-Color Exhibition," *Nation* 36, no. 920 (February 15, 1883): 156.

70. Van Rensselaer, "The Academy Exhibition," *Independent* 39, no. 2002 (April 14, 1887): 459.

71. Van Rensselaer, "Pictures of the Season in New York.—III," *American Architect and Building News* 20, no. 591 (April 23, 1887): 195.

72. Ibid.

73. Van Rensselaer, "The Academy Exhibition" (1887): 459.

74. [William A. Coffin], "The Academy Exhibition—1," *Nation* 44 (April 14, 1887): 327.

75. Van Rensselaer, "An American Artist in England," *Century* 27 (November 1883): 19.

76. See Carolyn Kinder Carr, "Prejudice and Pride: Presenting American Art at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition," in *Revisiting the White City: American Art at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1993), 63–123.

77. Coffin, "The Columbian Exposition. III. Fine Arts. Pictures by American Artists—Sculptural and Pictorial Decoration," *Nation* 57, no. 1468 (August 17, 1893): 115.

78. John C. Van Dyke, "Painting at the Fair, *Century* 48, n.s. 26, no. 3 (July 1894): 446.

79. Coffin, "The Columbian Exposition. II. Fine Arts: The United States Section," *Nation* 57, no. 1467 (August 10, 1893): 97.

80. Ibid.

81. Van Dyke, "Painting at the Fair," 446.

Figure List

Fig. 1
William Merritt Chase
American, 1849–1916
Portrait of the Art Dealer, Otto Fleischman, ca. 1870–1879
oil on canvas
26½ x 21½ inches
Gift of Dr. Max Hirshler, Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, Maine
1953.41
Photography by Dennis Griggs

Fig. 2
Thomas Eakins
American, 1844–1916
Singing a Pathetic Song, 1881
oil on canvas
45 x 32½ inches
Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
19.26

Fig. 3
John Singer Sargent
American, 1856–1925
Portrait of Elizabeth Nelson Fairchild, 1887
oil on canvas
19⁹⁄₁₆ x 18¼ inches
Museum Purchase, George Otis Hamlin Fund and Friends of the College Fund, Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, Maine
1985.40
Photography by Dennis Griggs

Fig. 4
Theodore Robinson
American, 1852–1896
Angelus, ca. 1879
oil on canvas
30½ x 20⅜ inches
Bequest of Mr. and Mrs. Nevil Ford, Colby College Museum of Art, Waterville, Maine

Fig. 5
Gari Melchers
American, 1860–1932
The Sermon, 1886
oil on canvas
62⅝ x 86½ inches
Bequest of Henry Ward Ranger through the National Academy of Design, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.
1944.11.2

Fig. 6
Winslow Homer
American, 1836–1910
Undertow, 1886
oil on canvas
29¹³⁄₁₆ x 47⅝ inches
Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts/ The Bridgeman Art Library

Fig. 7
George Inness
American, 1825–1894
The Valley on a Gloomy Day, 1892
oil on canvas
29⅞ x 45¼ inches
Gift of Thomas J. Watson, Jr., Colby College Museum of Art, Waterville, Maine
Photography by Peter Siegel

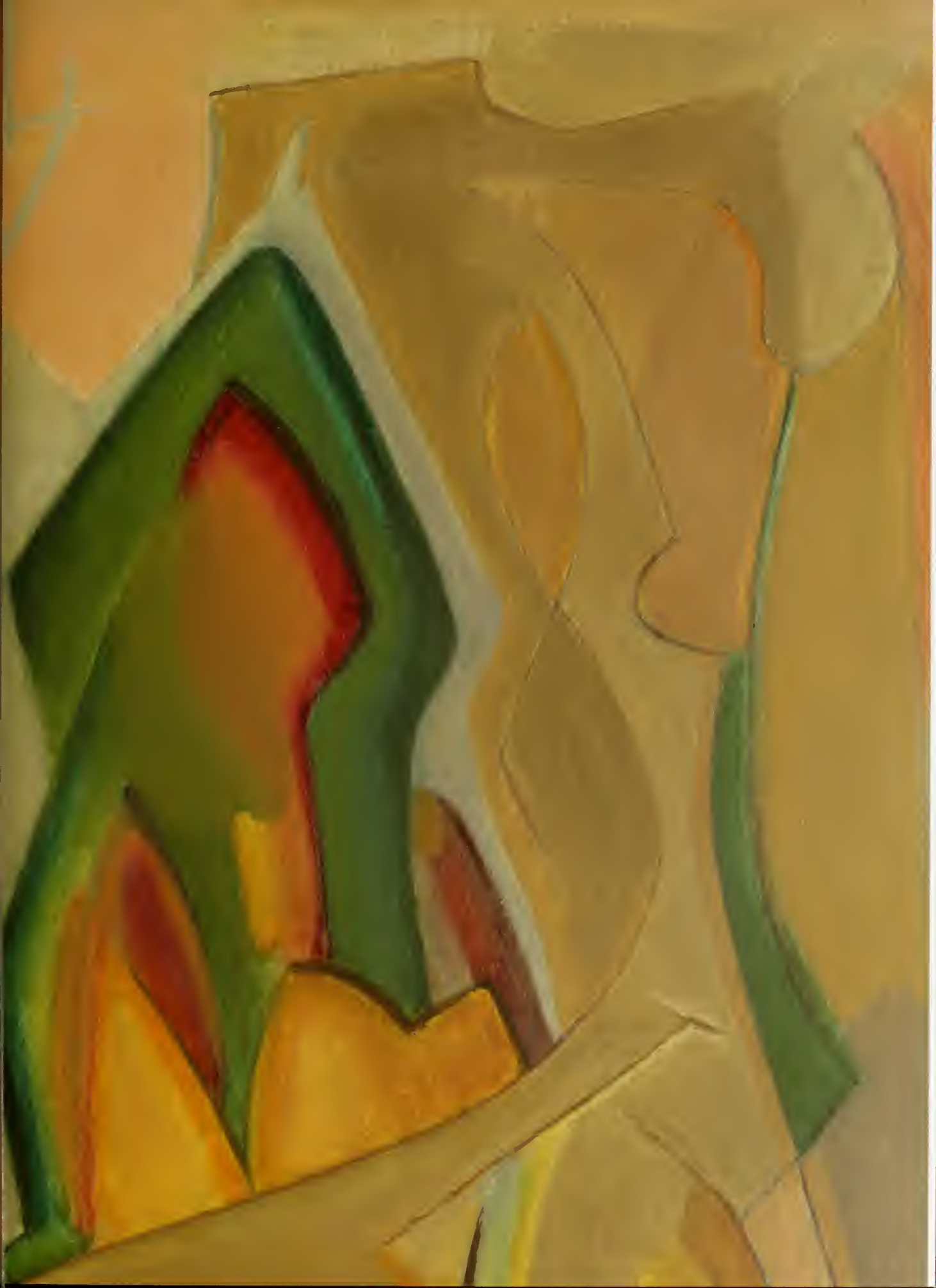


Fig. 1 Manierre Dawson, American, 1887–1969, *Untitled*, 1913. Gift of Dr. Lewis Obi, Mr. Lefferts Mabie, and Mr. Frank J. McKeown, Jr., Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut

Form and Color in American Art 1900–1925

Diana K. Tuite

(PAST AS) PROLOGUE

On his artistic coming-of-age trip to Europe in 1910, American artist Manierre Dawson found himself sketching alongside the venerable expatriate painter John Singer Sargent in Italy. Sargent enjoyed international prestige for his grand-manner portraits (see *Learning to Paint*, Fig. 3, page 18) and watercolors, and Dawson was a twenty-three-year-old engineer/architect from Chicago who had decamped to Europe in order to pioneer a new style of painting. Dawson had begun to rehearse the glyph-like forms that would characterize his production between 1910 and 1913 (Fig. 1). He was at work on a small composition based on a fountain, but emphatically not "a copy" of it, and the elder artist studied this painting in earnest, at no point saying that Dawson "was on the wrong track."[1] Watching Sargent paint, in turn, Dawson made an astute observation:

> I realize how little I know about the mechanics of painting. Above all Sargent's painting looks masterfully easy. But I notice one thing. At the start of a painting he is very careful and then as it develops he lays on the paint with more freedom. When about done he looks at it with piercing eye and making a stroke here, and another there, gives the whole a look of spontaneous dash. Although nine-tenth [*sic*] of the work is very careful indeed, there is a look of bold virtuosity when the thing is done.[2]

Dawson noted with some surprise that Sargent's technical bravura, with its connotations of immediacy and the pursuit of ephemeral effects, dressed a deep and premeditated structure. This broad and direct technique was, perforce, typical of his training in the Paris studio of Auguste Carolus-Duran. Carolus-Duran's progressive *alla prima* approach dictated painting directly onto the canvas with a loaded brush to preserve the freshness of the sketch. What Dawson saw in Sargent's method was how an undergirding structure might in fact coexist with seemingly irreconcilable surface effects; paint, as material substance and pigment delivered through brushstrokes, could soften the appearance of structural rigor without undermining its integrity. According to Dawson, it was not in matters of technique, but in the analysis of compositional exigencies that the two men parted ways. Where Dawson imputed premeditation to a "particularly determined slant" within an Old Master painting, Sargent "considered it the product of ignorance."[3] Their practical concerns, it seemed, were congruent, but in their analytic relationships to art they differed.

In the decade subsequent to Manierre Dawson's encounter with John Singer Sargent, the gulf between the elder artist and subsequent generations only widened. By 1921, photographer and sometime critic Paul Strand characterized Sargent's outmodedness in frank prose that evidenced a radical transformation of artistic values: "He gives us merely, but with greater ability, the average vision of the travel-book illustrator, a vision of which is photographic in the worst sense of the word, unorganized and formless – a record of something that has been seen rather than life that has been felt."[4] For Strand, Sargent's work suffered from artlessness in its fluid style, enervated form, and documentary dispassion. Brushwork that had once signified expressiveness was now recoded as merely descriptive.

This essay seeks to examine the decade or so between Dawson's dialogue with Sargent and Strand's censure of him. By considering the ways photographic and painterly production informed one another, practically and rhetorically,

and focusing in particular on the very compositional issues disputed by Dawson and Sargent, it sheds light on the ways that American artists reckoned with ever-changing propositions. If Americans had effectively borrowed and transposed French Impressionist painting, their relationship to Post-Impressionist impulses was highly mediated and accrued interpretative agency through channels of access, acts of reproduction, and new pedagogies. American artists endeavored to learn from recent French and German art while still utilizing the friction created by these mediations to shape original contributions to modernism.

To identify particular artistic strategies for self-definition entails unpacking the contingency of key terms in criticism of the period, and pressuring especially the protean possibilities for form and color. The contemporary expression of a historical *agon* between *disegno* and *colore*, form and color were no longer submerged in service to content.[5] Expatriate artist James Abbot McNeill Whistler (1834–1903), the harbinger of modernism for those individuals critical of John Singer Sargent, was frequently invoked in diagramming the new status quo:

> His [Whistler's] color has proved particularly attractive to students, to the young painters, perhaps because it is a veil behind which to hide inefficient drawing or because it makes good drawing easier. A knowledge of color is far more difficult to acquire than a knowledge of drawing, though either of these may be acquired by practice.[6]

Color, in this double bind, worked through misdirection; it either masked inadequacies of draftsmanship or else implied the likelihood of its having successfully done so, and yet its mastery was a requisite skill for a young modern artist to attain. Whether or not these two operations were interlocking or overlaid remained to be seen. Artists struggled to determine if systems of form and color could function independently of one another, but in concert, to fulfill compositional imperatives of plasticity.[7] Did the symbolic or expressive use of color occasion further formal abstraction, or did it, as artist Oscar Bluemner averred, beg a sustained commitment to a "concrete form of reality?"[8] Where some artists and critics relished the possibility of two discrete, lateral planes of operation, Max Weber, for one, still imposed a hierarchy: "I prefer a form even if it is black and white, rather than a tache of formless color."[9]

IN THE SHADOW OF IMPRESSIONISM: "... THE PAINTING OF *NEITHER* THINGS NOR LIGHT" —ARTHUR JEROME EDDY[10]

The first quarter of the twentieth century saw a further development of some of the central artistic antagonisms staged in the previous century, and earlier – line vs. color, finish and unfinish, for example. Upon its emergence, Impressionism had, of course, provoked ridicule for its dissolution of form for light and color. However, in the intervening decades, and given the activities of a score of significant American collectors, the movement had attained a singularly esteemed status in the United States. Due in part to the repatriation of artists like William Merritt Chase, and the seeding of instruction on native soil, American Impressionism became a firmly established school of painting. A 1908 landscape by former Chase student Marsden Hartley (Fig. 2) exhibits the loose and abbreviated brushwork and the preoccupation with fugitive outdoor conditions characteristic of the idiom.

Impressionism therefore predisposed American artists to particular modes of self-definition as they encountered and synthesized the work of subsequent European avant-gardes. In his 1914 book *Cubists and Post-Impressionism*, American collector Arthur Jerome Eddy explicitly pronounced expressiveness as the necessary extension of Impressionism: "But, no, there is the painting of *neither* things nor light – the painting of emotions – the painting of pure line and color compositions for the sake of the pleasure such harmonies afford – *the expression of one's inner self.*"[11] Painter William Zorach echoed these sentiments, communicating corporeal empathy to fellow painter Max Weber on this account: "'Max,' I said, 'to create a picture in space without benefit or hindrance of models, without the thing seen except with the inner eye, must be like tearing it out of your very guts.'"[12] Weber, in turn, characterized his artistic process as an alchemical conversion of raw subjectivity: "What I want to do now is to produce in terms of pigment my mental impressions, not a mere literal, matter-of-fact copying of line and form. I want to put the abstract into concrete terms."[13]

Such expressive drives clearly licensed non-representational painting in the privileging of form over subject matter. One critic charged that the still life, a mainstay of painting and the metonym for its studio artifice (therefore antipodean to the Impressionist project), made the most appropriate ve-

Fig. 2 Marsden Hartley, American, 1877–1943, *Late Fall*, ca. 1908. Alexandre Gallery, New York, New York

hicle for the new school of painting. If painting had become a conceptual exercise, the thinking went, then it no longer needed elaborate pretenses to meaningful content: "The theories of the modern-art extremists lead directly to still-life painting. If nothing is of any value in pictures but the vibration of light, the juxtaposition of colors, textures, and things of that kind, what is the use of going beyond a basket of fruit or a bunch of flowers?"[14]

COMING OF AGE, GOING ABROAD, WHEN "PICTURES PUZZLE AND COLORS RIOT"

—DETROIT EVENING NEWS, 1914[15]

Like Manierre Dawson, William Zorach, and Max Weber, many young artists traveled to Europe in the early years of the twentieth century in order to escalate their study of art. Since its founding in 1825, the National Academy of Design had functioned as the bastion of institutional standards for American studio art, but it had become an increasingly conservative professional association. The later nineteenth century had seen the creation of domestic channels of instruction with artists who had studied abroad, including the Paris-trained Robert Henri at the New York School of Art, and the Munich-trained William Merritt Chase at the New York School of Art and Art Students League. Henri recognized that training at the Parisian Académie Julian was central to his artistic formation, but he also saw how such an experience could be oppressive unless one moved beyond its prescriptions and prohibitions, declaring: "Those who have become distinguished have not been the men who were distinguished students in the schools."[16]

The next generation would take Henri's words to heart. Charles Sheeler first traveled to Europe as a pupil of William Merritt Chase in 1904 and 1905, and other artists like Charles Demuth and John Marin traveled back and forth for much of the decade between 1904 and 1914. Max Weber enrolled at the Académies Julian and Colarossi and at La Grande Chaumière in Paris, before striking out in new directions. What these artists all shared was a belief in the increasingly pluralist and extra-academic opportunities for artistic self-fashioning. William Zorach, who traveled to France in 1910 and enrolled at the Académie de la Palette, accorded his friends great respect for their decisions to depart from the norm: "It took vision and great receptivity for a young American artist in

Fig. 3 Max Weber, American, born Poland, 1881–1961, *Apollo in Matisse's Studio*, 1908. Copyright © Estate of Max Weber. Courtesy, Gerald Peters Gallery, New York, New York, and Santa Fe, New Mexico

Paris to discard academic tradition and face the unknown into which Art was leading in the year 1907.... It took courage to be in the vanguard and explore the expanding world of form and color with all men against him and neglect and derision his reward."[17] Many of the young artists who traveled abroad and encountered Post-Impressionist works on view at the Salon d'Automne or in the domestic salons of expatriates Gertrude and Leo Stein were disappointed by the absence of instructional opportunities in these veins.

The divergence between an artistic vanguard that many students wished to emulate and the mainstays for atelier instruction was only becoming more pronounced. In an effort to redress this situation, Henri Matisse was persuaded by a number of Americans in 1908 to open a studio school that would run through 1911. Max Weber, who had been in Paris since 1905, was among those acquaintances who attempted to recruit students from the American Art Club to join, but to little avail: "They would not hear of it and I was even ridiculed for making such efforts."[18] Once a quorum of ten students was finally attained, classes commenced with life study and drawing from casts. According to Weber, the studio class purchased a life-size cast after the Apollo Belvedere, and drawing from it was central to Matisse's instruction (Fig. 3).

This exercise, a cornerstone of most academic art instruction, may have chagrined some of the students, but it underscored the graphic discipline of Matisse's own practice.[19] Chief among his criticisms of student work was superfluity: "He abhorred technical bravura or superficial calligraphic flourish. He encouraged experimentation, but cautioned us of the subtle inroads and dangers of capricious violent exaggeration and dubious emphasis."[20] Matisse had recently been experimenting with the Divisionist techniques developed by Georges Seurat and Paul Signac.[21] While he would come to be seen as a profligate colorist by some American critics, his students were steeped in the history of color theory, and discouraged from irrational or unharmonious chromatic combinations, as Max Weber noted:

> Matisse cautioned against violent discordant pigmentation. "Good color sings," he would say, "it is melodious, aroma-like, never overbaked," and he preferred good *local* color to garish illogical chromatic *transposition* of local color.[22]

Matisse's course touched upon not only Michel Eugène Chevreul's *De la loi du contraste simultané* of 1839, but also its elaboration in the 1879 publication by American physicist Ogden Rood, *Modern Chromatics, with Applications to Art and Industry*. From these two texts, artists could distill an understanding of not only the law of simultaneous contrast, but also the laws of harmony of analogous colors, of contrasts, and the principle of gradation.

In this capacity, Matisse also functioned as an interlocutor for Paul Cézanne.[23] It was in April 1908 that works on paper by Matisse were first exhibited in the United States at Alfred Stieglitz's Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession. The single most ambitious venue for the exhibition of modern art

since it opened in 1905, the Little Galleries (or "291" as it came to be known) held the first public exhibition of Cézanne's watercolors in this country in March 1911, five years after his death. The year 1908 also saw the French publication of Matisse's influential article "Notes d'un peintre" (*Notes of a Painter*), which set forth some of his aesthetic and theoretical positions.[24] Edward Steichen, the painter and photographer who scouted for Stieglitz, wrote to the proprietor of 291 in terms that articulate the poles that Matisse and Cézanne would occupy for American audiences:

> I have another crackerjack exhibition for you that is going to be as fine in its way as the Rodins are. Drawings by Henri Matisse the most modern of the moderns.... They are to the figure what the Cézannes are to the landscape.[25]

For all of these reasons, Matisse became something of a lens through which American modernist art production was viewed.

Whereas Cézanne was relatively quickly awarded Old Master status, Matisse was held accountable for tendencies running counter to the academic and, in the most extreme cases, treated as a decadent influence.[26] The 1910 exhibition of his "disciples" at 291 featured work by John Marin, Alfred Maurer, Max Weber, and Edward Steichen, among others. As one critic noted, "'Influenced by Matisse' has become the common explanation of anything that seems queer, any departure from the old standards of artistic representation."[27] In other words, invocation of Matisse performed the same cultural labor that a reference to Impressionism used to do.[28] Among the students who exhibited their Parisian paintings in New York was Max Weber. When Weber's *Apollo in Matisse's Studio* was shown along with other canvases at the Haas Gallery in spring of 1909, Matisse's influence was readily perceived: "Henri Matisse has been his model, perhaps idol. Ugliness and beauty in art are relative terms.... Possibly this young man may forget Paris, and then he will get into the Academy."[29] Weber's painting shows the Belvedere cast bathed in light from the window, with students' easels encircling it. The colors are keyed high and the brushwork, particularly on the plaster figure, alludes to, but resists, modeling form, as though Weber is struggling to shed his academic training.[30] He uses crude – more drawn than painted – parallel hatching across the figure's calf and shoulder blades, but makes no radial adjustments for the curvature of these planes.

"AMERICAN ART IS ABOVE EVERYTHING ELSE SKILLFUL." —WILLIAM GLACKENS[31]

Coincident with the American introduction to French modernism was the institutionalization of art criticism in the United States. While criticism was becoming increasingly professionalized in the late nineteenth century, it was only around 1907 that newspapers began to hire writers whose exclusive province consisted of coverage of the arts.[32] Elizabeth Luther Cary, for example, was designated the *New York Times* art critic in 1908, and she functioned in many ways as the foil to conservative writers like Royal Cortissoz at the *New York Tribune*. Defining their field as they laid out the terms in which modern art would be apprehended, these writers sometimes realized the need to adjust their critical apparatus so as to prove its relevance: "We are even forbidden to criticize the post-impressionists, for, we are told by one of their great admirers, if they have done nothing else, they have proved the futility of art criticism, which is founded on the formulas that they have discarded, and is always a day later than the art criticized."[33] A discursive critical field was coalescing in step with American artists' modernist praxis, and an array of new periodicals such as *Camera Work* and *Arts and Decoration* yielded artists the opportunity to publish commentary on themselves and one another.

What then were some of the key terms and criteria for American critics of the moment, and how did they filter into the rhetoric of artistic self-definition, and mold artistic practice? American artists of the late nineteenth century had attempted to define a native school by demonstrating their facility with evolving technical standards for landscape and figure painting. Draftsmanship, color, and brushwork all figured into this rubric, with the emphasis shifting as the content of painting became increasingly subjective. Of Post-Impressionism, however, at least this much was agreed upon: "If the movement proves anything at all it proves that artists cannot live on technique alone."[34] Technique, and the criticism which vaunted it, had become irrelevant. Although the picturesque treatments of realist subjects by Robert Henri and the Ashcan School would, on the surface, appear to have little in common with the epistemological redress of painting performed by artists like Manierre Dawson, these artists shared a belief in an authentic art grounded in the sentient individual's experience of the present. Henri disparaged the

quibbling over nationalist prescriptions of subject matter and technique: "And the more serious [among us] have talked much about 'subject' and 'technique,' as though if these were acquired, this desired thing, a national art, would flourish quickly and beautifully; whereas, as a matter of fact, a national art is not limited to a question of subject or of technique, but is a real understanding of the fundamental conditions personal to a country, and then the relation of the individual to these conditions."[35]

Indeed, this new set of aesthetic values, including a diminished emphasis on technique, was reflected in the retrospective reassessment of artists who could be valorized for their fulfillment of other ends. Winslow Homer was one such individual whose reputation as an autodidact trained outside of the academy rendered him an appropriate model for an instinctual native style, as professor and color theorist Albert H. Munsell noted:

> In attempting an appreciation of Homer's masterly art, first place should be given to its broad human message, rather than its technique, which is unsophisticated and almost brutal, yet never obscures the genuineness of his expression. Technique is an external quality, and may be rough or smooth; the drawing may be academic or clumsy, the color grim or suave, yet if it conveys a direct message from one human being to another, and leaves the impression of nature, its work is complete.[36]

At the same time that Homer could be held aloft as an artist who eschewed technical conventions for universal themes rendered in appropriately crude fashion, he could also be used to justify the necessity of American exposure to modern European influence. Those modern art boosters who wished to deflect charges that Americans were producing derivative work made the case for Homer and George Inness having come into their own only after having come under the influence of the French.[37]

By the same token, an excess of technique could be seen as hampering the expression of individuality and evidencing too much of a European taint. A deft watercolor technician, Charles Demuth was sometimes accused of permitting his technique to eclipse all else in his compositions: "His craftsmanship is so perfect that it is not always quite alive. For despite much seeking and experiment Demuth has yet to disentangle himself from the sophistication of contemporary French influence."[38] Where it had been enough for an artist's brushwork to carry the trace of his temperament in the nineteenth century, pronounced originality of vision was now the paramount quality an artist needed to exhibit. If American artists were "above everything else skillful," the compulsory skills were changing. Demonstrable originality was prized, but it had to be underwritten by sincere depth of conviction; flagrant or shallow strategies for telegraphing originality backfired in a host of directions.[39]

Increasingly non-mimetic representations risked undermining themselves with seeming arbitrariness. Those who borrowed pictorial effects from technological or scientific registers were perhaps most scorned on the grounds that they ventured outside of painting where they should have relied on its internal necessities. Oscar Bluemner railed against the work of Jacques Villon on these grounds, accusing the artist of having merely adopted the outlook of "prism glasses" in his creations of "pattern play."[40] In their 1913 *Study of the Modern Evolution of Plastic Expression*, Marius de Zayas and Paul Haviland similarly reproached those American artists whom they perceived as importing abstract logic "from geological stratifications, from mineral crystallizations, from the organism of microbes, from anatomical photographs ... and applying those structures to the human form and to landscapes."[41]

"COLOR FOR COLOR'S SAKE IS AS RIDICULOUS AS ART FOR ART'S SAKE."

—WILLIAM J. GLACKENS[42]

Much of the early twentieth-century discourse on the visual arts had its roots in the century prior. Critics like Elisabeth Luther Cary, who in 1907 published *The Art of William Blake: His Sketch-Book, His Water-Colours, His Painted Books*, were disposed to mine the past for new and compelling analogies. Indeed, the mystical Blake was frequently held up to inform the modernist disposition of form and color: "William Blake, for example, puzzled the critics terribly.... But his vision was restricted to form. He did not imagine a purple being regarding another of vivid green – perhaps because he lived before the day when that combination of colours had become symbolical of a great movement on behalf of freedom."[43] Where this assessment of Blake took note of the exigencies of his

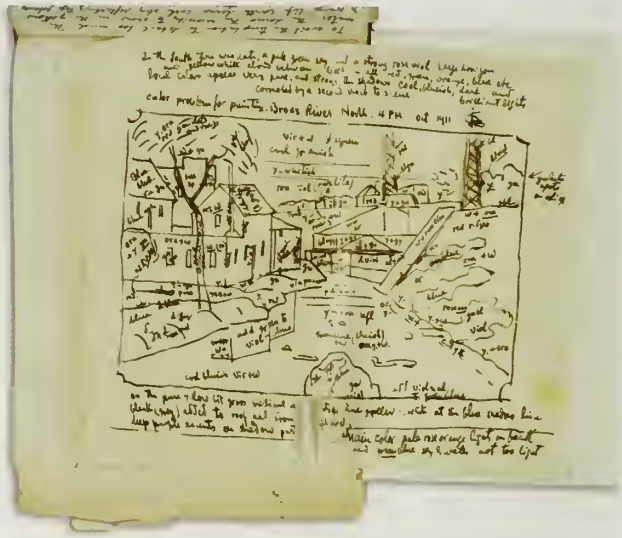
Fig. 4 William Zorach, American, 1889–1966, *Untitled*, ca. 1917. Gift of Dahlov Ipcar and Tessim Zorach, Bowdoin College Museum of Art

work, it manifested traces of the positivism of nineteenth-century French critic and historian Hippolyte Taine.

Taine's writings advanced the interpretation of aesthetic production within the particularities of cultural milieus and remained quite influential in the burgeoning art literature of the United States.[44] A chromatic conservatism was attributed by Phyllis Ackerman, playfully, but in terms that echoed Taine's logic, to America's Puritanical residues: "And we have carried from the northern Puritan civilization of England this colorlessness to our country, which is not northern, not naturally colorless and in some respects at least no longer Puritan."[45] This same author hypothesized that an American aversion to extravagant color might explain the lack of receptiveness to modern art.

Color, of course, had always been the index to a perceptual experience of nature, but, under the sign of Cézanne and other Post-Impressionists, it was becoming a constructive agent in its own right. The reactions to a 1909 exhibition of recent work by Alfred Maurer and John Marin are enlightening in this respect. Formerly a "Whistlerian" who had studied with William Merritt Chase before departing for Paris, Maurer was not enrolled in the Académie Matisse but circulated in the same spheres.[46] In the introduction to an exhibition of fifteen oil sketches by Maurer and twenty-four watercolors by Marin, critic and 291 devotee Charles Caffin wrote of Maurer:

> In these ... color notes of spiritual impressions received in the presence of nature, he is not aiming at the representation of the landscape, but at the projection on the panel of the color harmonies with which for the moment nature has inspired him. They are primarily to be judged as little creations of color beauty, with the same detachment from notions of subject matter, [with which] you approach the appreciation of a piece of antique pottery.[47]



Caffin, who invoked antique and East Asian aesthetics to mollify objections to new pictorial values, stressed that Maurer's work was responsive to nature, if not faithful to its appearance. He construed Maurer's motives, along with those of his peers, as follows: "They would borrow from nature only so much form as may supply a scaffold on which to hang the decoration of a color fantasy."[48] Where Caffin exalted Maurer for hitting all the right notes in terms of harmonious composition and spiritual intensity, other reactions would not be so sympathetic; Maurer became emblematic of Fauvist excesses and Marin, working in watercolor, was perceived as taking up the mantle of originality within acceptable limits. *Camera Work*, the quarterly journal that Stieglitz had been publishing since 1903, was known for excerpting the critical responses to exhibitions at 291 and republishing these in its pages, showing the extent to which this discourse was absorbed into artistic practice. Among the more restrained responses to Maurer's work was this: "All form seems to be lost in straining for light that almost blinds and for color that cries aloud."[49] Even as a number of these critics expressed resignation to such new currents in modern art, they seemed discomfited by the total collapse of form into color. Typically, expressive color was anchored by formal elements, or ambig-

Fig. 5 Oscar Bluemner, American, born Germany, 1867–1938, *Sketch 14 from a painting diary, 12 June 1911 – 30 January 1912.* Courtesy of the Oscar Bluemner papers, 1886–1939, 1960, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Fig. 6 Oscar Bluemner, American, born Germany, 1867–1938, *Sketch 15 from a painting diary, 12 June 1911 – 30 January 1912.* Courtesy of the Oscar Bluemner papers, 1886–1939, 1960, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Fig. 7 Oscar Bluemner, American, born Germany, 1867–1938, *Landscape with Arched Trees*, 1918. Museum Purchase, George Otis Hamlin Fund, Bowdoin College Museum of Art

uous forms could resolve through local color. Instead, what resulted here, with form "straining" and color "crying," was the sensory competition of two systems that had heretofore functioned sympathetically.

Reaction to Marin's work formed as if in opposition to the response to Maurer's and made a case for the watercolor medium's exceptional status. No less inclined to use pure hue as local color than Maurer, Marin received approbation. As J. E. Chamberlin wrote in the *Evening Mail*, "It is a fair prediction that some time these broad yet delicate things, in which there is the spirit of Whistler and a color that is pure, original, vivacious and subtle, will be famous."[50] Indeed, Marin was held up by some as a faithful acolyte of Whistler, and by others as an untutored heir to Winslow Homer. A medium whose material properties could be construed as governing technique, and one that was therefore held to different standards, watercolor had, by this time, become associated with innate attributes of American character.[51]

Oscar Bluemner was another 291-affiliated artist to wrestle with the reconciliation of the role of a perceptual experience of nature in this new vision for painting. Trained as an architect in Germany, Bluemner had emigrated to the United States in the 1890s, and one of his first positions was as a draftsman for the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Disillusioned with architecture, Bluemner embarked upon a systematic artistic self-education documented to some extent in his painting and theory diaries (Figs. 5 and 6). He traveled in 1912 to Europe where he exhibited his work and was party to exhibitions of German Expressionism, Futurism, and Post-Impressionism, admiring particularly Vincent van Gogh's attempt to "do with color what others do with light values."[52] Upon his return, Bluemner stripped and repainted much of the work he had produced from 1911 to 1912.

Within his subsequent artistic practice, it was Bluemner's philosophical contention that subject matter was irrelevant, but that it was impossible to deny a connection to the material world:

> Whatever inner impulse we address towards nature is abstract. Thus a landscape, as a motive for expression, undergoes a free transformation from objective reality to a subjective realization of personal vision. Thus the forms, tones, colors we call natural are so changed that the painting harmoniously corresponds to the idea by which it is inspired.[53]

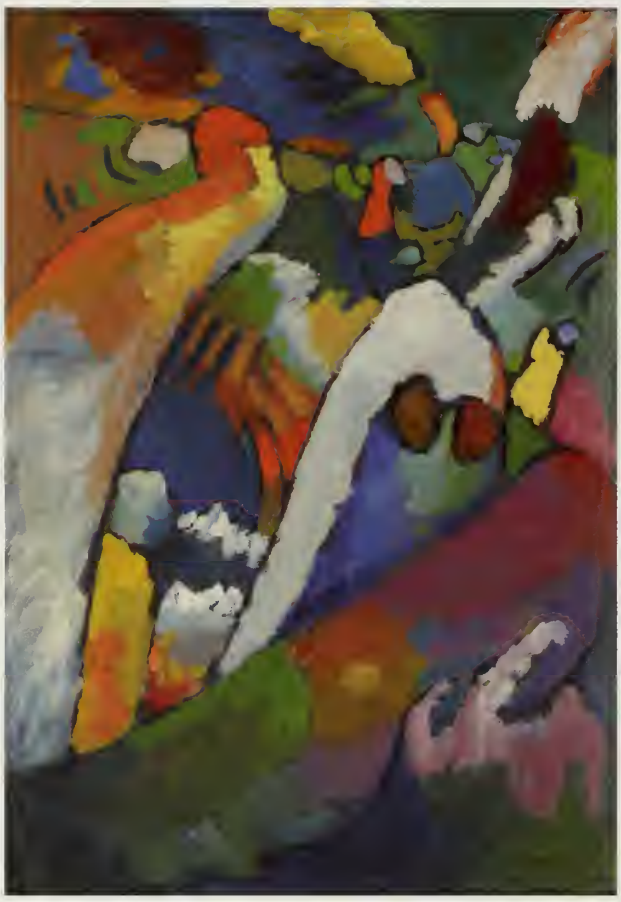


Fig. 8 Wassily Kandinsky, Russian, 1866–1944, *Improvisation No. 7 (Storm)*, 1910. Gift of Collection Société Anonyme, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut

It was within that perceptual merging of the natural world and one's experience of it that Bluemner sought to locate his paintings. Nature, treated symbolically, furnished him with his architectonic vocabulary (Fig. 7), and the artist worked on all areas of his composition at once, conceiving of harmony in the imbrication and idealization of these forms and colors. For Bluemner, there could be no such thing as pure abstraction if it neglected pictorial unity, a position that he sharpened against the work of German artist Wassily Kandinsky (Fig. 8). Bluemner disavowed Kandinsky's paintings as the work of a "theorist," filling the margins of a copy of Arthur Jerome Eddy's 1914 book *Cubists and Post-Impressionism* with annotations about the works reproduced. Of the Kandinsky painting *Improvisation No. 30*, he wrote, "Yet this 'composition' is not art; in so far as it lacks unity of form, simplicity and visible ordre [sic]. And indeed it is merely [an] arrangement of sensitive whims!"[54]

THE VALUE OF TONE

Tone, coming uncoupled from the volumetric descriptiveness of *chiaroscuro*, but still available as a structural principle, preoccupied many artists of this period. One essay published in *Camera Work* correlated the decline of tone to technological developments, lamenting the demise of the kerosene lamp and "the reign of half-and-quarter-tones."[55] Tone, often used interchangeably with "value," refers to the lightness or darkness of a particular color, and it offered some artists a system for rationalizing the application of color. In order to structure the harmonic distribution of light and dark tones in his paintings, Oscar Bluemner developed a working method that consisted of ample sketches, including charcoal studies, and half-scale watercolors. Referring to these studies as "*notans*," Bluemner communicated his awareness of the compositional precepts of Arthur Wesley Dow, the artist, theorist, and teacher who first published his manual *Composition* in 1899. In it, Dow borrowed the concept of *notan* ("light and dark") from Japanese art and designated it a central principle in pictorial construction. The popularity of Dow's book meant that the term gained tremendous currency in the reception of modern art. Charles Caffin, for one, used it to characterize the watercolors of John Marin: "Marin is part of that fermentation which, started by Cézanne and stirred by Matisse, has given new impulse to the artist's old recipe of seeing the world for himself. The watercolors are harmonies of indescribably delicate tonalities, wrought on the Japanese principle of Notan."[56]

In photography, tone remained necessarily descriptive of forms, and this was something that a practitioner could exploit in his craftsmanship. For Paul Strand, writing in 1917 before color photography had moved beyond the experimental stage, photography's most remarkable properties were

Fig. 9 John Marin, American, 1870–1953, *Weehawken Sequence*, ca. 1916. Estate of John Marin, Courtesy Meredith Ward Fine Art, New York, New York

its textural evocativeness and the subtlety of its tonal range. He emphasized that the medium's capacity in this regard surpassed that of the most academic draftsman to perceive or record:

> This means a real respect for the thing in front of him, expressed in terms of chiaroscuro (color and photography having nothing in common) through a range of almost infinite tonal values which lie beyond the skill of the human hand.[57]

In *Wire Wheel* (Fig. 10), Strand advanced his case for a straight photography that capitalized on its "uniqueness of means."[58] The spokes of the automobile wheel, intensely illuminated from behind and slightly out of focus, dematerialize, appearing almost as the cast shadow of a wheel. The body of the car, counterintuitively, reads as a matte surface, lusterless and ripe with tonal bloom, particularly at its edges. Here, the headlight, its function as an emitting agent inverted, captures and refracts the silhouettes of neighboring skyscrapers. It offers the only spatial allusion beyond Strand's emphatic study of the lines of the vehicle. Strand's skill at exploiting photography's tonal possibilities registered universally with critics. Royal Cortissoz noted his aptitude for insinuating color in his rich black-and-white photographs: "This photographer has a good sense of composition and some of the pictures have a remarkably fine color suggestiveness in their tones."[59]

Indeed, this period saw advances in the organization and standardization – artistic and industrial – of color through a number of systems, including one developed by Albert Munsell. An artist and art instructor, Munsell drew on the work of physicist Ogden Rood in devising a system that diagrammed color according to three of its properties: chroma, value, and hue. With the publication of Munsell's 1905 *A Color Notation*, color could be diagrammed in three dimensions: "By means of these three dimensions it is possible to completely express any particular color, and to differentiate it from colors ordinarily classed as of the same general character."[60] Munsell patented his color chart, a sphere divided into ten segments. His system also relied upon a device called a daylight photometer which measured the value or luminosity of a color, and located its grayscale equivalent: "A photometric scale of value places all colors in relation to the extremes of white and black, but cannot describe their hue or their chroma."[61] That color might be suggested through tonal variety is certainly an aspiration of Royal Cortissoz's reaction to Paul Strand's photography. Arthur Wesley Dow even absorbed Munsell's system into the revised edition of *Composition* published in 1912.

Fig. 10 Paul Strand, American, 1890–1976, *Wire Wheel, New York, 1920*, 1920, printed in 1976–1977. Gift of Michael E. Hoffman in honor of Melissa Harris, B.A. 1982, and Richard Benson, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut

PHOTOGRAPHY AND FORM: "... PHOTOGRAPHY COMES TO SUPPLY THE MATERIAL TRUTH OF FORM."

—MARIUS DE ZAYAS[62]

In a 1910 article for *Camera Work* entitled "On the Possibility of New Laws of Composition," Sadakichi Hartmann alleged that it was due to an abundance of "reproductive processes" that the era witnessed an increased scrutiny of form and pictorial composition. He opened the article by averring, "The wealth of reproductive processes has enlarged our visual appreciation of form and general aspect of things to a marvelous degree. Photography, no doubt, has furnished the strongest impetus."[63] Ontologically, photography occupied a malleable position, and, vis-à-vis painting, it could be marshaled to serve paradoxical ends. The camera was hamstrung by mimetic expectations, and the photographer tasked with a creative challenge. Where the painter might compose "by an effort of imagination," the photographer "interprets by spontaneity of judgment."[64] Photography was both celebrated and critiqued for furnishing an excess of visual information, those "fotographic [*sic*] superfluities" that Bluemner wanted to expunge from his canvases.[65]

Bluemner, like critic Charles Caffin, believed that photography's capacity for verisimilitude and totality of representation meant that painters had to instead coax their medium towards an expressive simplification. Caffin characterized Matisse's pictorial strategies as expedient in his 1911 book *The Story of French Painting*. Exhorting modern painters to follow suit, he wrote:

> He [the modern painter] must carry simplification beyond the camera's limited ability to simplify and must rely especially upon that which is absolutely outside the camera's ability, namely, organization. Thus he leaves photography to play with the representation of form, while he, like El Greco, will subordinate, and if necessary, sacrifice or violate, form for the sake of the supreme end – expression.[66]

In this illuminating passage, Caffin identified the preserve of painting as its ability to structure pictorial composition in ways that photography could not, namely with willfully arranged components. Caffin located precedent in El Greco, the sixteenth-century Spanish painter who realized pictorial unity through color and a deformation of figuration. By this logic, naturalism was now the province of photography, leaving painting free to be expressive, ideatic, and abstract. One critic for the *New York Evening Mail* demonstrated how exaggerations of such a rationale could be used to impugn modern artists: "If nature is to be followed, why, let the camera do that. The artist should paint only abstractions, gigantic symbols, ideas in broad lines, splotches of color that suggest the thoughts that broke through language and escaped."[67]

Caffin, who had published *Photography as a Fine Art* in 1901 and *How to Study Pictures by Means of a Series of Comparisons of Paintings and Painters* in 1905, was committed to developing a protocol for compositional analysis, something he enacted by way of photographic reproductions. In this role as a proxy and conduit for establishing relationships between modern and Old Master painting, the photograph was implicated in issues of form and color. As a reproductive technology, photography could be seen not only to communicate the material truth of three-dimensional reality, but also to lay bare the compositional bones of artistic representations. When oil paintings by Matisse and Cézanne, for example, were not available for exhibition at 291, black-and-white reproductions of works were featured alongside prints, drawings, or watercolors.[68] These photographs, in which "every touch was evident," seemed to traffic as authoritative stand-ins for the works they depicted, but they also registered as something other.[69] Such photographs, both on exhibit and embedded in texts, served as a mechanism for bracketing color. In a letter to Alfred Stieglitz in 1911, Marsden Hartley described the role that such black-and-white reproductions of works by Cézanne played in enhancing his comprehension of the artist's work. [70]

Willard Huntington Wright, the brother of Stanton Macdonald-Wright, was one prolific writer who relied on photographic analysis of form, particularly of historical paintings, in order to mount his argument for an art of color that developed parallel to the art of composition within the "borrowed" medium of painting. Wright lambasted those critics who propagated the idea that modern art enacted a total break from the history of art, and an indiscriminate rejection of its values: "Mr. [Kenyon] Cox's aesthetic ossification is due to the very common error (which grows out of one's limit to understand) that, in order to appreciate modern painting ... one must forgo the older masters. The

Fig. 11 Alvin Langdon Coburn, American and British, 1882–1966, *Vortograph*, ca. 1917. Gift of Alvin Langdon Coburn, Courtesy of George Eastman House, International Museum of Photography and Film, Rochester, New York

reverse is the truth. A work of modern art must be judged by the same aesthetic principles that one applies to the older art; and modern painting must stand or fall on adherence to those principles."[71] Wright dwelled on the historical primacy of draftsmanship in the working methods of artists, and he invoked black-and-white reproductions of paintings as evidence of the robustness of their structural and tonal devices and the secondary application of color:

> That is why the majority of the works of the old masters are as artistic in black-and-white reproduction as in their original colors. In fact, many an old masterpiece is superior in black-and-white reproduction, for it comes nearer to the artist's original conception; and the function of the superimposed colors (which was not then understood) does not clash with the function of the lines and forms.[72]

Even as Wright stressed the exclusion of color from classical painterly conception, underscoring the prominence of monotint studies, he maintained that contemporary art should be held to the same principles "of form and organization which animate all great painting, and which are to be found in every great masterpiece of graphic art ...."[73] Isolating the formal register of paintings by way of photographic reproduction certainly abstracted them in productive ways, and these representations were in no way interpreted as mimetic. Indeed, Paul Strand excoriated his fellow photographers for imitating those "inferior" painters whose work was perhaps most legible in reproduction:

> The work of Rubens, Michelangelo, El Greco, Cézanne, Renoir, Marin, Picasso, or Matisse cannot be so easily translated into photography, for the simple reason that they have used their medium so purely, have built so much on its inherent qualities that encroachment is well-nigh impossible.[74]

As Strand saw it, photography could just as easily betray its *parergon* in its inadequate representations of the most sophisticated painterly compositions.

This notion of photography's "material truth of form" was, inevitably, something that certain photographers would push back against as they attempted to accomplish in photography what was happening in the other arts. As strong a proponent for the artistic stature of photography as Charles Caffin saw limitations for the practitioner: "There is, however, that other field of art which is occupied, not with facts of sight, but with ideas of the imagination. This is outside the range of the photographic point of view."[75] Alvin Langdon Coburn was one such photographer who set out to redefine

this "point of view." "If it is not possible to be 'modern' with the newest of all the arts, we had better bury our black boxes," intoned Coburn in his 1916 article "The Future of Pictorial Photography."[76] The camera's black box had become a coffin for a moribund art, when it should instead have been a device for combining forms at will, replete with infinite plastic possibility. Over the course of a series of photographs called "Vortographs" produced between 1916 and 1917, Coburn set out to demonstrate that photography might be apprehended in a formal rather than an informational register.

This series was so named because Coburn had become involved, through Ezra Pound, in the British Vorticist movement. The images were produced through an improvised device that used mirrors to create kaleidoscopic effects, the details of which the photographer would not disclose.[77] While Coburn did produce Vortographic portraits of Pound, many of the works featured arrangements of prisms or pieces of wood (Fig. 11). It seems likely that Coburn selected these prisms for their congruity with Vorticist principles – their hard-edged geometric structure and their seeming sculptural reification of effects. But in their transparency, of course, the edges dissolve and refract so that moments of relay multiply to a point of excess. The crystals function more as lens than as subject matter. As subject matter, they are both present and absent, *spaces* more than surfaces. With these, Coburn introduced an abstract lexicon for photography divorced entirely from the conditions of its own production.

THE AUTOCHROME AND COLOR FEVER[78]

The relationship between photography and painting, shot through as it was with repercussions for form and color, was complicated by the development of popular color photographic processes and was obviously a complex negotiation for those individuals who worked as painters and photographers. The pursuit of color photographic technologies dated to at least the middle of the nineteenth century. But it was not until June 1907 that the Lumière brothers, Auguste and Louis, demonstrated the first commercially viable such technology at the Paris Photo-Club. They had been working to perfect their autochrome process since 1903. In short, this technology involved glass plates treated with a light-sensitive emulsion and a layer of microscopic potato-starch grains dyed green, blue, and red. Spread across the plate, these grains functioned as color filters. Once the emulsion was developed into a negative, it was chemically reversed into a black-and-white positive behind the dyed potato-starch grains. The result was a color image contained within two bonded glass plates. Edward Steichen had been present for the Lumière brothers' demonstration, and he functioned as the tutor for many other Americans, including Alfred Stieglitz and Alvin Langdon Coburn.

During the first eighteen months after the autochrome became commercially available, there were nearly two hundred articles on the topic published in photographic journals.[79] The "painters' new rival," the autochrome was met with a degree of overblown apprehension before it became apparent that it would function more to crystallize limited possibilities than to supplant painting. As singular objects whose inert color was activated by illumination from behind with suffused light, rather than by light merely glancing off their surface, autochromes embodied the scientific relationship between light and color. Steichen relished this quality the most: "There are color harmonies which can only be indulged in when colors as luminous as in enamel or stained glass are available – such combinations are possible on Autochrome plates."[80] Due in part to the complexity of producing and exhibiting it, the autochrome was a rather short-lived phenomenon in Photo-Secessionist circles. Several of the 1908 issues of *Camera Work* were devoted to discussions of the autochrome process, punctuating the end of Alfred Stieglitz's exclusive focus on photography at 291 and in the pages of *Camera Work*.[81]

Photographer Alvin Langdon Coburn viewed the autochrome process as a further crucible for honing the distinction between amateur and professional photographers. So much of photography's self-definition rested in its tonal dimensions, and Coburn recognized that the ability to capture color now presented more of a challenge than a solution: "Much more than the old monochromist, the new color photographer will have to select his picture, rearrange his omelettes and flowers and sunlight, pick out the single perfect picture from among the dozens of discordant pictures which nature offers him at every turn."[82] By Coburn's logic, if held to pictorial standards, natural color was bound to disappoint or offend unless properly managed.

Fig. 12 Charles Sheeler, American, 1883–1965, *Staircase, Doylestown*, 1925. Gift of the Joseph H. Hirshhorn Foundation, 1972, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Fig. 13 Charles Sheeler, American, 1883–1965, *Staircase, Doylestown*, ca. 1925. Gift of Dr. J. Patrick Kennedy, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut

Fig. 14 Edward Steichen, American, 1879–1973, *Moonlight Dance, Voulangis*, 1909. Gift of James Augustine Healy, Portland Museum of Art, Maine

THE PAINTER-PHOTOGRAPHERS

Edward Steichen and Charles Sheeler both worked in painting and photography concurrently. Beginning in 1914, Sheeler earned a living in part from photographing paintings and sculpture for galleries like Marius de Zayas's Modern Gallery and for private collectors. His photography was introduced to the public in a 1917 group exhibition at de Zayas's gallery, *Photography by Sheeler, Strand, and Schamberg*. The photographs of African sculpture on view at the Modern Gallery were praised for leaving "nothing to be desired from the point of view of photography."[83] Later that year, Sheeler's first solo exhibition comprised twelve photographs of his Doylestown, Pennsylvania, house.[84] Many of these were interior scenes taken at night, with Sheeler eschewing natural light for brilliant, high-contrast studio lighting.

The Doylestown series demonstrated Sheeler's capacity for staging a domestic interior as he would a piece of sculpture or relief, in this case framing spatial vignettes in order to imbue them with formal ambiguity. When he returned to painting with renewed intensity after a successful interval of commercial photography, Sheeler used these Doylestown photographs as the inspiration for a composite approach to painting. A self-proclaimed and punning "turning point" in his work, *Staircase, Doylestown* (1925) (Fig. 12) was one of only a few paintings from the decade so conceived; it was not until the 1930s that Sheeler would habitually produce paintings after his photographs. In the case of this painting, Sheeler enacted a cyclical retrieval, taking a photograph of a finished painting based, as it were, on his photographs (Fig. 13).

Staircase combines the austerity of his earlier photographic series with his tendency to render anthropomorphic elements as eerie surrogates. Here, the awkwardly situated tables at right, one spindly-legged and the other draped in cloth, both appear curiously animate, as though they have stolen into the frame. The red-legged table confounds the visual fluency of the fanning staircase by collapsing space.

Fig. 15 Man Ray, American, 1890–1976, *Untitled*, 1921. Museum Purchase, Lloyd O. and Marjorie Strong Coulter Fund, Bowdoin College Museum of Art

Sheeler departs most from photographic representations where he exploits the pigment. Thin in places, and uneven, the oil does not observe the same fidelity to drawn boundaries here that it does throughout the rest of the work, and these mottled surfaces and tonal variations are even more pronounced in the photograph of the painting than in the painting itself.

Exhibiting simultaneously as a painter and photographer, Edward Steichen analyzed the relationship between the two media through his practice. Spending the greater part of a decade in France before 1914, Steichen built a country house in Voulangis, in Brittany. *Moonlight Dance, Voulangis* (Fig. 14) is one of few paintings to survive from this period since he would later destroy many of these canvases in a bonfire in 1920: "I was through with painting .... I wanted to be able to reach into the world, to participate and communicate, and I felt I would be able to do this best through photography."[85]

Steichen seemed to recognize, retrospectively, the outmodedness of his early paintings, many of them landscapes with nymph-like figures embedded in the scene. Mining classical and Symbolist traditions for his subject matter, and achieving relationships between landscape and figure reminiscent of seventeenth-century painter Nicolas Poussin, Steichen had conceived of his paintings as tonal exercises. The monochrome nature of *Moonlight Dance, Voulangis*, with its atmospheric details, renders it more like a contemporary photograph than any painting. Steichen's pronounced interest in the descriptive capacities of tone would eventually contribute to his abandonment of painting for photography: "But there are certain things that can be done by photography that cannot be accomplished by any other medium, a wide range of tones that cannot be reached in painting."[86]

On visiting Steichen's studio in Paris, Marius de Zayas noted the anomalousness of the work, and, therefore, its fulfillment of a modernist precondition. He wrote to Alfred Steiglitz: "This work does not in any way show the influence of the modern movement, for what I congratulate him. He is doing his own work."[87] Likewise some of the critics who responded to Steichen's paintings on view in the 1910 "Younger American Painters" exhibition at 291 noted that they "look almost old-fashioned in the company where they find themselves."[88] Atmospherically evocative, the paintings may have consistently elicited such responses due to their incongruity with the colorism of the moment.

"COLOR-FORMS"

American artists Stanton Macdonald-Wright and Morgan Russell collaborated on what they perceived as a conceptually original response to questions of plasticity, form, and color. Macdonald-Wright traveled to Paris in 1907, where he met Russell in 1911 and the two began their incubation of "Synchromism," literally translated as "with color." According to the two men, Synchromism espoused the two-dimensional interpretation of sculptural form through color properties

Fig. 16 Stanton Macdonald-Wright, American, 1890–1973, *"Conception" Life-cycle Series No. 11: Tinted Sketch for Synchromie in Blue-Violet*, 1914. Collection, Gerald Peters Gallery, Santa Fe, New Mexico

rather than light and shadow. Using color as the armature for form, they retained an emphasis on the rhythms of *contrapposto* (the sculptural activation of form through asymmetry) by reinterpreting *chiaroscuro* (the two-dimensional means for achieving sculptural effects). Russell had studied sculpture at the Art Students League in New York, and it was *The Dying Slave*, a sculpture by Italian Renaissance artist Michelangelo Buonarroti, that Russell identified as central to his theoretical formation of what he called "color-form."

Just how this constructive color was meant to function was something to which Macdonald-Wright and, particularly, Russell devoted quite a bit of ink. Classical in its emphasis on rhythmic unity of composition, and yet modern in its reliance on a mechanics of color, Synchromism was premised on the strategic placement of colors whose properties would contribute to an instinctual sensory experience of depth. Depth, in this formulation, does not follow from the illusionistic representation of three-dimensional space, but is provoked by the colors' "natural propensity."[89] As they expressed it:

> In thus creating the subjective emotions of depth and rhythm we achieve the dreams of painters who talk of drawing the spectator into the center of the picture, but instead of his being drawn there by intellectual processes he is enveloped in the picture by *tactile sensations*.[90]

Although it is only a watercolor study for the oil *Conception Synchromy* (Whitney Museum of American Art), *Tinted Sketch for Synchromie in Blue-Violet* (Fig. 16) does capture the oscillating transparency and opacity of color required to create strobing effects.

As assimilated as they both were to European artistic milieus, Russell and Macdonald-Wright debuted their first Synchromist works together at *Der Neue Kunstsalon* in Munich in June of 1913.[91] It was not until March 1914 that a Synchromist exhibition opened in New York, at the Caroll Galleries. For the foreword to the catalogue, the two artists enlisted the aid of Stanton's brother, author and art critic Willard Huntington Wright, and he elucidated the movement's motives for differentiation:

> To begin with, the word Synchromism is not meant to stand for a school, but is employed by Mr. Macdonald-Wright and Mr. Russell merely that they may escape classification under labels which do not express their tendencies.... In its very nature it is more universal than such restricted and technically meaningless appellations as "Fauveism," [*sic*] "Futurism" and "Cubism." Synchromism is an artistic principle rather than a method, and as such can never become a "school."[92]

Fig. 17 Patrick Henry Bruce, American, 1881–1936, *Plums*, 1912. Gift of Collection Société Anonyme, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut

On behalf of his brother and Russell, Wright underscored the importance of the retention of artistic principles without prescriptive methods, ends without codified means. He expressed the two artists' reticence to be counted among any of the new but nevertheless academic "schools" of modern art, for whom principles mattered less than superficial exercises in effects.

While he is not formally associated with Synchromism, Patrick Henry Bruce is an artist sometimes annexed to the movement on account of superficial affinities. After studying with Robert Henri in New York, Bruce relocated to Paris in 1904. There he was among the first students to enroll in Matisse's studio classes, including his sculpture course, and he stayed on for their duration. Much of Bruce's painting from his first few years abroad (Fig. 17) is transparent in its subservience to Paul Cézanne. Bruce tried his hand at painting still lifes, imitating the painter's constructivist brushstroke, and cultivating a partial treatment of the canvas. This still life of mixed fruit, historically misidentified as *Plums*, is a prime example of the young artist working through Cézanne; it suffers from an excessive regularity of stroke size and directionality, appearing static and hesitant rather than shimmering with sure-handed structural dynamism. Preferring to efface the early stages in his development, Bruce later destroyed all of the paintings he produced between 1912 and 1916.

Continuing to pursue new approaches to the expression of plastic form, Bruce began painting from photographs in 1914.[93] This strategy led to his prominent incorporation of black and white in what would become his most exhibited group of early paintings. The 1916 series, *Compositions*, was, in very Post-Impressionist fashion, based on a dance hall called "Le Bal Bullier," and was very much a breakthrough for Bruce. With this series of six canvases, Bruce arrived at compositions so exaggerated in their emphasis on surface that they project an optical impregnability (Fig. 18). All vestiges of naturalism, even at its most analytical, have disappeared. Where Russell and Macdonald-Wright were attempting to work within the scientific protocol of optics, even as they married it to emotion, Bruce's operations are almost cerebral. The areas of black and white in *Composition II* suggest the intervention of photography; in their emphatic flatness these passages show Bruce playfully revoking the volumetric propositions he sets forth at places where contours imply edges. He fragmented colors at those junctures that could be perceived as the borders between multiple faces of volumetric forms, as in the red semicircle at center left whose intersections beg for its interpretation as a cylinder.[94] Charles Caffin recognized that the appreciation of these works rested in "a capacity of reasoning out one's sensations, joined to a vivid feeling for structural organization."[95]

Fig. 18 Patrick Henry Bruce, American, 1881–1936, *Composition II*, ca. 1916. Gift of Collection Société Anonyme, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut

Fig. 19 Elie Nadelman, American, 1885–1946, *Head Turned Right, Looking Down*, ca. 1904–1907. Museum Purchase, George Otis Hamlin Fund, Bowdoin College Museum of Art

"EACH OBJECT ... SHOULD MAKE ITS OWN COMPOSITION."

One thing that many artists and critics of the first quarter of the twentieth century shared was a belief in the expression of intrinsic, or endogenous, form: "All natural objects have some sort of *purpose*. And the photographer should strive primarily for the expression of the *purpose*. Each object (like the free verse of Whitman) should make its own composition."[96] The parameters for the manifestation of this form were fluid and variable. Artist Elie Nadelman (Fig. 19) explained his imperative to form as a function of self-imposed constraints: "I employ no line other than the curve, which possesses freshness and force. I compose these curves so as to bring them in accord or opposition to one another. In that way I obtain the life of form, i.e. harmony. In that way I intend that the life of the work should come from within itself."[97] Oscar Bluemner, Manierre Dawson, and John Marin had all trained as architects, a biographical circumstance that arguably contributed to their architectonic conceptions of color. Stuart Davis, in 1921, had come a long way from the Gloucester scenes he painted alongside John Sloan in the summer of 1916 (Figs. 20 and 21). While he acknowledged that compositions no longer need proceed from the study of nature, he still saw color proceeding from form: "The complicated drawing on the canvas should suggest a plastic unit which in turn suggests a logical coloration."[98]

As chairman of the Domestic Committee, William Glackens had presided over the selection of American artists featured in the 1913 Armory Show. These included himself, Robert Henri, Oscar Bluemner, John Marin, Stuart Davis, Morgan Russell, Patrick Henry Bruce, Alfred Maurer, Joseph Stella, and Abraham Walkowitz, among others. Even as he acknowledged a lack of ardent innovation in American art, Glackens held out hope for it to internationally nurture itself, preaching cautious optimism: "But the national art, the truly national art, must be the result of growth; it has never come as a meteor."[99] Americans, in his estimation, had sound foundational structures, but they lacked vitality. Some early critics even perceived this imminence in works they were otherwise condemning: "Wrong these things may be ... but they drive home to their high purpose with a force which changes canon and convention and awakens unbounded enthusiasm in the student of today; the artist of tomorrow."[100] If experimentation with form and color had intensified the debate around an "art for art's sake," a self-sufficiency of pictorial expression with connotations of decadence, the events of the Great War, and the period thereafter would, of course, radically reconfigure things. Not until after the next global conflict would the American "artists of tomorrow" reprise many of these inquisitions with similar intensity, but more directness, concerned less with the permeation of media than with their distillation.

Fig. 20 Stuart Davis, American, 1892–1964, *Portuguese Church–Sketch*, 1916. Gift of Earl Davis, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut

Fig. 21 Stuart Davis, American, 1892–1964, *Portuguese Church*, 1916. Gift of Earl Davis, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut

Notes

1. Manierre Dawson Papers, Journal 1908–1922, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Reel 64.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Paul Strand, "American Water Colors at the Brooklyn Museum," *Arts* 1, no. 3 (December 1921): 149.

5. Italian for "drawing" or "design," *disegno* characterized the Florentine emphasis on linear composition as distinct from the Venetian *colore*. On the history of this distinction, see Jacqueline Lichtenstein, *The Eloquence of Color: Rhetoric and Painting in the French Classical Age* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1993.) By interpolating a third term, Georges Roque offers observations on this historical dichotomy in the modern era. See "Writing/Drawing/Color" in *Yale French Studies* no. 84 (1994): 43–62.

6. "The American Section, The National Art: An Interview with the Chairman of the Domestic Committee, William J. Glackens," *Arts and Decoration* 3, no. 5 (March 1913): 162.

7. On the contemporary valences of plasticity, and especially the associations with tactility, see Jill Kyle, "Paul Cézanne, 1911; Nature Reconstructed," in Sarah Greenough, ed., *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries*, exh. cat., Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art (Boston: Bullfinch Press, 2000), 107–08.

8. Oscar Bluemner: "Is color in painting possible and desirable without the concrete form of reality? Is soul without body? Body without soul?" See Oscar Bluemner, "Walkowitz," *Camera Work* 44 (October 1913): 38.

9. Max Weber, "Chinese Dolls and Modern Colorists," reproduced in Jonathan Green, *Camera Work: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Aperture, 1973), 204.

10. Arthur Jerome Eddy, *Cubists and Post-Impressionism* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1919), 11.

11. Ibid.

12. William Zorach, "Max Weber," Max Weber Papers, 1904–1962, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Reel NY69–88.

13. "Maker of Curious Pictures in Town: Weber Modestly Unburdens His Soul and Discusses His Rivals," *Baltimore Evening News*, 1915, Max Weber Papers, Reel NY69–82.

14. Charles Leonard Moore, "Wanted: A Handbook of Criticism," in *The Dial: A Semi-monthly Journal of Literary Criticism, Discussion, and Information*, March 16, 1911, volume L, no. 594: 201.

15. "Pictures Puzzle and Colors Riot at Art Museum," *Detroit Michigan Evening News*, February 28, 1914, Joseph Stella Papers, 1905–1970, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Reel 347.

16. Robert Henri, "Progress in the National Art Must Spring from the Development of Individuality of Ideas and Freedom of Expression: A Suggestion for a New Art School," *The Craftsman* 15, no. 4 (January 1909): 394.

17. William Zorach, "Max Weber," Max Weber Papers, Reel NY69–88.

18. Max Weber, "The Matisse Class," Max Weber Papers, Reel NY59–6. This was a lecture on the occasion of the MoMA retrospective of Matisse's work on view from November 13, 1951 to January 13, 1952.

19. See the conjecture of William Gerdts, *The Color of Modernism: The American Fauves*, exh. cat. (New York: Hollis Taggart Galleries, 1997): 35. For a thorough study of Matisse as teacher, see Alfred H. Barr, *Matisse: His Art and His Public* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1951).

20. Max Weber, "The Matisse Class," Max Weber Papers, Reel NY59–6.

21. American student Greta Moll recalled Matisse's explanation for the shift towards the Fauvist broken color for which he was heralded at the 1905 Salon d'Automne in Paris: "He used color abstractly, working in color planes – which he said expressed a greater tranquility than pointillist dots and patches." Greta Moll quoted in William Agee and Barbara Rose, *Patrick Henry Bruce, American Modernist: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1979), 92n28.

22. Max Weber Papers, 1904–1962, Reel NY59–6.

23. Since the American reception of Cubism is filtered through Matisse and Cézanne, this essay brackets the particularities of the movement in an effort to understand issues more broadly.

24. "Notes of a Painter" was published in *La Grande Revue* on December 25, 1908.

25. Quoted in Sarah Greenough, ed., *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries*, exh. cat. Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art (Boston: Bullfinch Press, 2000), 83–4.

26. See, most recently, Gail Stavitsky, ed., *Cézanne and American Modernism*, exh. cat., Montclair, N.J.: Montclair Art Museum; Baltimore, Md.: Baltimore Museum of Art; (New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press, 2009).

27. Quoted in Marius de Zayas, *How, When, and Why Modern Art Came To New York*, Francis M. Naumann, ed. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 7.

28. "As it was the fashion several years ago to call almost everything which was different from the Academic 'Impressionistic' so now the tendency is to apply the name of Matisse to anything which is not understood." *New York Herald* quoted in de Zayas, *How, When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York*, 7.

29. "April Art Notes," *New York Morning Sun* (April 30, 1909): 6. Quoted in William H. Gerdts, *The Color of Modernism: The American Fauves*, exh. cat. (New York: Hollis Taggart Galleries, 1997), 35.

30. Weber was among those artists who had joined Steichen's so-called "New Society of American Artists" in Paris in 1908. This professional organization positioned itself as a counterpoint to the moribund Society of American Artists which had formed in 1877 as a more inclusive community than the National Academy of Design. Though the New Society's founding was intended as a symbolic referendum on the status quo, and its purpose was advocacy more than the fomenting of revolution, it was nevertheless aligned with global artistic secessions. See "American Artists in Paris Divided: Younger Painters Form a New Society and Declare War on Old Organization," *New York Times* (February 26, 1908): 4.

31. See *Arts and Decoration*, 159.

32. See Arlene R. Olson, *Art Critics and the Avant-Garde: New York, 1900–1913* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980).

33. B. P. Stephenson in *The Evening Post* quoted in "Rousseau as I Knew Him," original manuscript in the collection of Joy Weber, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

34. James Gibbons Huneker, "Seen in the World of Art," *New York Sun*, January 1, 1911. Quoted in Howard Anthony Risatti, "American Critical Reaction to European Modernism, 1908 to 1917" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign, 1978), 111.

35. Henri, *The Craftsman*, 387.

36. Quoted in William Howe Downes, *The Life and Works of Winslow Homer* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911), 266.

37. "It was through France that Homer, with America, began to get a knowledge or, in fact, a first sight of actual values. That is true, too, in the instance of George Inness, who worked his way out of the rut of the Hudson River school only after he had secured the assistance of the art of France." *Arts and Decoration*, 159.

38. Paul Strand, "American Water Colors at the Brooklyn Museum," *Arts* 1, no. 3 (December 1921): 151.

39. "The latest manifestations of art have been constantly assailed by the general public on the ground that the artists' principal motive was to display originality and the public has refused to investigate any further." See Marius de Zayas and Paul B. Haviland, *A Study of the Modern Evolution of Plastic Expression* (New York: "291," 1913), 29.

40. A copy of Eddy's book, which according to a 1914 inscription by Alfred Stieglitz was annotated by Bluemner, is included in the library of the Georgia O'Keeffe Research Center, Santa Fe, New Mexico. Of the Jacques Villon painting *Young Girl* opposite page 32, Bluemner writes: "This picture is not art.... It is rather an artificial vision; namely certain devices (prism glasses) or certain observations are employed in order to transform a mere model of reality into that pattern-play."

41. de Zayas and Haviland, 29.

42. *Arts and Decoration*, 164.

43. "The Grafton Group," *Daily Citizen*, March 26, 1913, Max Weber Papers, 1904–1962, Reel NY59–6.

44. See, for example, "Taine and the Science of Criticism," *Nation* 16 (March 16, 1893): 193–4.

45. Phyllis Ackerman, "Why is American City Home of Drab Color? Countryside Rich with Hues; City Flat and Dull and Drab with Grays and Browns, Blues and Tans," John Henry Bradley Storrs scrapbook and studio book, 1909–1972, 1909–1938, Archives of American Art, Reel 1463.

46. Stacey B. Epstein, *Alfred Maurer: Aestheticism to Modernism*, exh. cat. (New York: Hollis Taggart Galleries, 2000), 26.

47. Quoted in "The Maurers and Marins at the Photo-Secession Gallery," *Camera Work* 27 (July 1909): 41. In introducing this point, Caffin traced Maurer's artistic evolution more thoroughly: "The quondam pupil of Mr. Chase had had his eyes opened by Matisse. He had been led to discover other colors in his paint box than blacks and drabs and white; also to look for color beyond the walls of an artificially darkened studio. There, under the indirect persuasion of Matisse, he has found himself seeing, not only local color, but visions of color, evoked from the actual facts, by the play of his imagination under the spell of some particular mood."

48. Ibid.

49. Mr. Harrington, *New York Herald*, April 5, 1909, quoted in "The Maurers and Marins at the Photo-Secession Gallery," *Camera Work* 27 (July 1909): 44.

50. Quoted in "The Maurers and Marins at the Photo-Secession Gallery," *Camera Work* 27 (July 1909): 43.

51. See Barbara Dayer Gallati, "Language, Watercolor and the American Way," in Linda S. Ferber and Barbara Dayer Gallati, eds., *Masters of Color and Light: Homer, Sargent, and the American Watercolor Movement*, exh. cat. (Washington: Brooklyn Museum of Art in Association with Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998), 144. "Because the [watercolor] medium's physical properties demanded of artists a quickness, facility, decisiveness, and confidence (to get it right on the first stroke), the process of watercolor painting came to stand as an easily understood metaphor for the active American spirit."

52. Quoted in Barbara Haskell, *Oscar Bluemner: A Passion for Color*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2005), 33.

53. From the exhibition catalogue *Forum Exhibition of Modern American Painters* (New York: Anderson Galleries, 1916), reproduced in Haskell, 194.

54. This reaction to Kandinsky was hardly unusual. Willard Huntington Wright likewise critiqued Kandinsky for his disavowal of the physical and scientific properties of forms and colors in favor of what Wright interpreted as a regressive spiritualism. See Willard Huntington Wright, *Modern Painting: Its Tendency and Meaning* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1927), 313.

55. A. Chameleon [Sadakichi Hartmann], "Modern Chiaroscural Deficiencies and their Influence on Pictorial Art," *Camera Work* 26 (April 1909): 19–22.

56. Charles Caffin, "John Marin," *Camera Work* 27 (July 1909): 42.

57. Paul Strand, "Photography" first published in *Seven Arts* (August 1917), reproduced in Alan Trachtenberg, ed., *Classic Essays on Photography* (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980), 142.

58. Ibid., 141.

59. Quoted in de Zayas, *How, When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York*, 10.

60. H. E. Clifford, Introduction to second edition of A. H. Munsell, *A Color Notation: A Measured Color System, Based on the Three Qualities Hue, Value, and Chroma* (Boston: Geo. H. Ellis Co., 1907), 4.

61. Munsell, 18.

62. Marius de Zayas, "Photography," *Camera Work* 41 (January 1913): 19. "Photography represents Form as it is required by the actual state of the progress of human intelligence. In this epoch of fact, photography is the concrete representation of consummated facts. In this epoch of the indication of truth through materialism, photography comes to supply the material truth of Form."

63. Sadakichi Hartmann, "On the Possibility of New Laws of Composition," *Camera Work* 30 (April 1910): 23.

64. Ibid., 24.

65. Quoted in Haskell, 40.

66. Charles Caffin, *The Story of French Painting* (New York, The Century Co., 1915), 213–14. Caffin first wrote about Matisse in 1909 for *Camera Work*, and visited the artist's studio in the summer of 1910.

67. J. E. Chamberlin in the *New York Evening Mail*, reproduced in Jonathan Green, ed., *Camera Work: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Aperture, 1973), 175.

68. See Greenough, 89. While in Europe, Max Weber had obtained eighteen large black-and-white photographs of Cézanne's paintings that had been taken by gallery proprietor Eugene Druet. These may have been shown at 291 even in advance of the opening of the 1910 exhibition there. They are being exhibited for the first time since in *Cézanne and American Modernism*, an exhibition that originated at the Montclair Art Museum in 2009.

69. Weber quoted in Stavitsky, 27.

70. Quoted in Stavitsky, 214.

71. Willard Huntington Wright, "The Aesthetic Struggle in America," *Forum* (February 1916): 208.

72. Willard Huntington Wright, *The Future of Painting* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, Inc., 1923), 20.

73. Ibid., 51.

74. Paul Strand, "The Art Motive in Photography," *The British Journal of Photography* 70. Reprinted in Nathan Lyons, ed. *Photographers on Photography* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1966), 148.

75. Charles H. Caffin, "The Camera Point of View in Painting and Photography," *Camera Work* 24 (October 1908): 23.

76. Alvin Langdon Coburn, "The Future of Pictorial Photography," *Photograms of*

the Year, 1916, 23. Reprinted in Beaumont Newhall, ed. *On Photography: A Source Book of Photo History in Facsimile* (Watkins Glen: Century House, 1956), 149.

77. Coburn's desire to keep the device "veiled in mystery" was noted at the exhibition of the Vortographs at London's Camera Club in February 1917. See "Mr. Bernard Shaw on 'Vortography': The 'Coburns' at the Camera Club," *Amateur Photographer*, February 19, 1917 (clipping in Alvin Langdon Coburn scrapbook, George Eastman House, Rochester, New York).

78. Alvin Langdon Coburn to Alfred Stieglitz, October 5, 1907, Stieglitz Archives, YCAL MSS 85. "I have the color feavre [*sic*] badly and have a number of things that I am simply in raptures over."

79. John Wood, ed., *The Art of the Autochrome: The Birth of Color Photography* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1994), 9.

80. Edward Steichen, "Color Photography," *Camera Work* 22 (April 1908): 23.

81. Wood notes that the autochromes also served to bridge the transition from manipulated photography in a Symbolist idiom to "straight photography." See Wood, 14.

82. "The Painters' New Rival: An Interview with Alvin Langdon Coburn," *American Photography* 2, no. 1 (January 1908): 16.

83. *American Art News*, March 31, 1917, quoted in de Zayas, *How, When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York*, 114.

84. As a number of scholars have noted, there is some question as to the original date of the photographs. On this topic, see Karen Lucic, *Charles Sheeler in Doylestown: American Modernism and the Pennsylvania Tradition*, exh. cat. (Allentown: Allentown Art Museum, 1997).

85. Mary Steichen Calderone, "Edward Steichen as Painter: A Remembrance," *The Paintings of Edward Steichen*, exh. cat. (Huntington: The Heckscher Museum, 1985), 13.

86. Anne Cohen DePietro, "The Paintings of Edward Steichen," *The Paintings of Edward Steichen*, 17.

87. Marius de Zayas to Alfred Stieglitz, December 22, 1910, quoted in de Zayas, *How, When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York*, 159.

88. B. P. Stephenson, *New York Evening Post* quoted in *Camera Work* 31 (July 1910): 47.

89. Willard Huntington Wright, Foreword to "Exhibition of Synchromist Paintings by Morgan Russell and S. Macdonald-Wright," Caroll Galleries, March 2 – March 16, 1914, Stanton Macdonald-Wright Papers, 1907–1973, Archives of American Art, Reel LA5.

90. Stanton Macdonald-Wright Papers, 1907–1973, Archives of American Art, Reel LA5.

91. Gail Levin has noted that many of the works featured in this exhibition were destroyed or have yet to be located. See Gail Levin, *Synchromism and American Color Abstraction, 1910–1925* (New York: George Brazillier, 1978), 20.

92. Stanton Macdonald-Wright Papers, 1907–1973, Archives of American Art, Reel LA5.

93. Due to the fact that Bruce destroyed much of his personal archive, there is little information as to the nature of the photographs he used and his procedure for working from them. That he did so is known from surviving correspondence from his close friend Arthur Burdett Frost, Jr.

94. Barbara Rose notes that no surviving copy of the catalogue for the March 1917 exhibition of these *Compositions* has been located, but speculates that the introduction would have discussed the subject matter that inspired them. See Agee and Rose, 58.

95. "Significant Still Lifes By Bruce," *New York American* (November 27, 1916), reproduced in Agee and Rose, 218.

96. Sadakichi Hartmann, "On the Possibility of New Laws of Composition," *Camera Work* 30 (April 1910): 26.

97. Elie Nadelman, "Notes for a Catalogue," *Camera Work* 32 (October 1910): 41.

98. Stuart Davis Papers, 1911–1966, Notebook, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Reel 3842.

99. *Arts and Decoration*, 160.

100. "Art and Artists," *Philadelphia Press*, November 12, 1911, quoted in Elizabeth Johns and Sylvia Yount, *To Be Modern; American Encounters with Cézanne and Company*, exh. cat. (Philadelphia: Museum of American Art of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1996), 11.

Figure List

Fig. 1
Manierre Dawson
American, 1887–1969
Untitled, 1913
oil on cardboard
28½ x 21¼ inches
Gift of Dr. Lewis Obi, Mr. Lefferts Mabie, and Mr. Frank J. McKeown, Jr., Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut
1980.86

Fig. 2
Marsden Hartley
American, 1877–1943
Late Fall, ca. 1908
oil on board
12 x 14 inches
Alexandre Gallery, New York, New York

Fig. 3
Max Weber
American, born Poland, 1881–1961
Apollo in Matisse's Studio, 1908
oil on canvas
23 x 18½ inches
Copyright © Estate of Max Weber. Courtesy, Gerald Peters Gallery, New York, New York, and Santa Fe, New Mexico

Fig. 4
William Zorach
American, 1889–1966
Untitled, ca. 1917
watercolor over graphite
13 7/16 x 10 1/16 inches
Gift of Dahlov Ipcar and Tessim Zorach, Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, Maine
1979.73.a
Photography by Peter Siegel

Fig. 5
Oscar Bluemner
American, born Germany, 1867–1938
Sketch 14 from a painting diary, 12 June 1911 – 30 January 1912
handwritten, illustrated
6 11/16 x 8¼ inches
Courtesy of the Oscar Bluemner papers, 1886–1939, 1960, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Fig. 6
Oscar Bluemner
American, born Germany, 1867–1938
Sketch 15 from a painting diary, 12 June 1911 – 30 January 1912
handwritten, illustrated
6 11/16 x 8¼ inches
Courtesy of the Oscar Bluemner papers, 1886–1939, 1960, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Fig. 7
Oscar Bluemner
American, born Germany, 1867–1938
Landscape with Arched Trees, 1918
gouache
4⅞ x 5⅞ inches
Museum Purchase, George Otis Hamlin Fund, Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, Maine
1979.47
Photography by Dennis Griggs

Fig. 8
Wassily Kandinsky
Russian, 1866–1944
Improvisation No. 7 (Storm), 1910
oil on pasteboard
27 9/16 x 19 3/16 inches
Gift of Collection Société Anonyme, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut
1941.527

Fig. 9
John Marin
American, 1870–1953
Weehawken Sequence, ca. 1916
oil on canvasboard
9 x 12 inches
Estate of John Marin, Courtesy Meredith Ward Fine Art, New York, New York

Fig. 10
Paul Strand
American, 1890–1976
Wire Wheel, New York, 1920, 1920, printed in 1976–1977
palladium print
13 13/16 x 11 inches
Gift of Michael E. Hoffman in honor of Melissa Harris, B.A. 1982, and Richard Benson, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut
1991.137.2

Fig. 11
Alvin Langdon Coburn
American and British, 1882–1966
Vortograph, ca. 1917
gelatin silver print
11 11/16 x 8 13/16 inches
Gift of Alvin Langdon Coburn, Courtesy of George Eastman House, International Museum of Photography and Film, Rochester, New York
67:0098:0006

Fig. 12
Charles Sheeler
American, 1883–1965
Staircase, Doylestown, 1925
oil on canvas
25⅛ x 21⅛ inches
Gift of the Joseph H. Hirshhorn Foundation, 1972, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
Photography by Lee Stolsworth

Fig. 13
Charles Sheeler
American, 1883–1965
Staircase, Doylestown, ca. 1925
gelatin silver print
8½ x 7 1/16 inches
Gift of Dr. J. Patrick Kennedy, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut
2007.197.5

Fig. 14
Edward Steichen
American, 1879–1973
Moonlight Dance, Voulangis, 1909
oil on canvas mounted on masonite
24¼ x 25 inches
Gift of James Augustine Healy, Portland Museum of Art, Maine
1948.9
Photography by Matt Hamilton, Williamstown Art Conservation Center

Fig. 15
Man Ray
American, 1890–1976
Untitled, 1921
gelatin silver print
8¾ x 6⅞ inches
Museum Purchase, Lloyd O. and Marjorie Strong Coulter Fund, Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, Maine
1988.17
Photography by Dennis Griggs

Fig. 16
Stanton Macdonald-Wright
American, 1890–1973
"Conception" Life-cycle Series No. 11: Tinted Sketch for Synchromie in Blue-Violet, 1914
watercolor and ink
23 x 17⅝ inches
Collection, Gerald Peters Gallery, Santa Fe, New Mexico

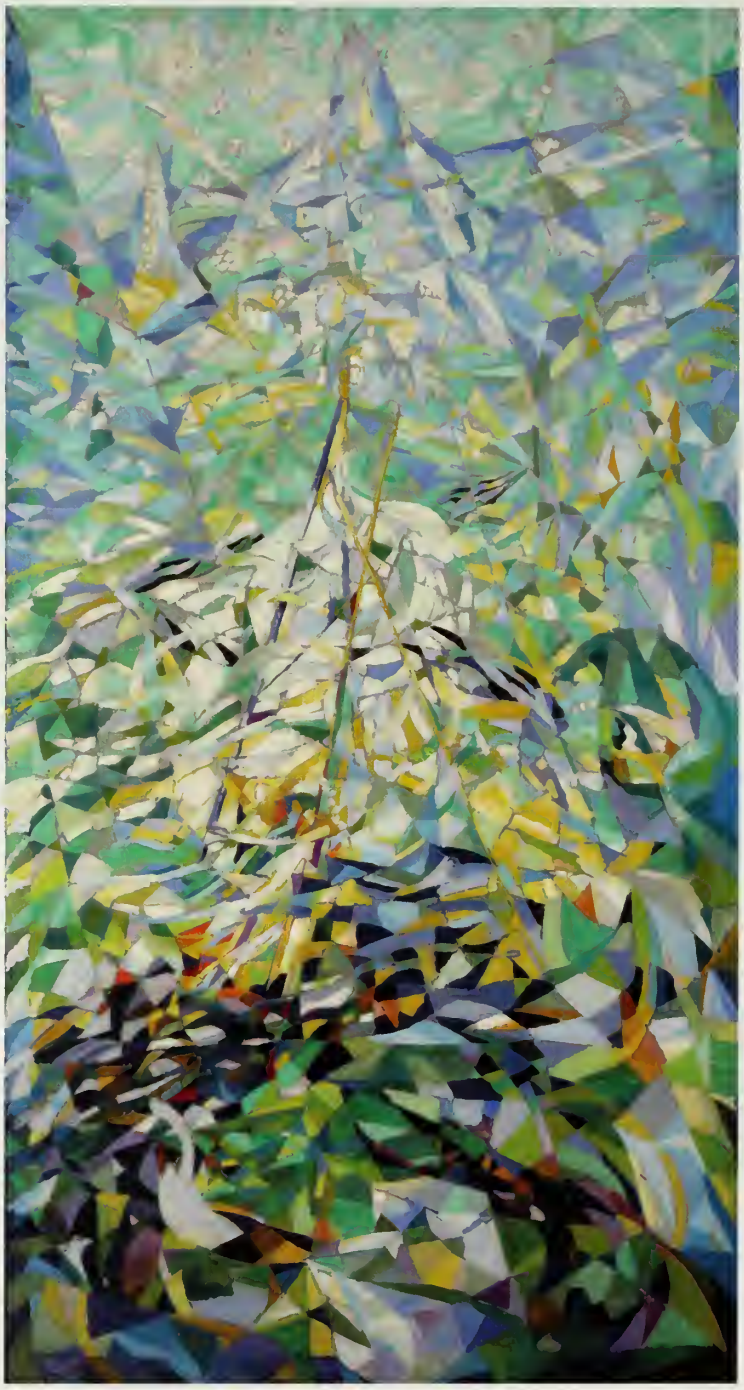
Fig. 17
Patrick Henry Bruce
American, 1881–1936
Plums, 1912
oil on canvas
12⅝ x 16 7/16 inches
Gift of Collection Société Anonyme, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut
1941.371

Fig. 18
Patrick Henry Bruce
American, 1881–1936
Composition II, ca. 1916
oil on canvas
38⅜ x 51¼ inches
Gift of Collection Société Anonyme, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut
1941.369

Fig. 19
Elie Nadelman
American, 1885–1946
Head Turned Right, Looking Down, ca. 1904–1907
black ink
12¼ x 8⅛ inches
Museum Purchase, George Otis Hamlin Fund, Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, Maine
1979.44
Photography by Dennis Griggs

Fig. 20
Stuart Davis
American, 1892–1964
Portuguese Church–Sketch, 1916
oil on canvas
23 x 19 inches
Gift of Earl Davis, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut
2005.111.1

Fig. 21
Stuart Davis
American, 1892–1964
Portuguese Church, 1916
oil on canvas
23 x 19⅛ inches
Gift of Earl Davis, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut
2005.111.2



Joseph Stella, American, 1877–1946,
Spring (The Procession), ca. 1914–1916. Gift of
Collection Société Anonyme, Yale University
Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut

Afterword

Diana Tuite would like to thank Catherine Whitney, Bowdoin alumna and director of twentieth-century art at the Gerald Peters Gallery, Santa Fe, for hosting her visit there, and Joy Weber, the daughter of Max Weber, for opening her home and archives to her. She would also like to thank art historians Charles Butcosk and Rachael DeLue for their insightful conversations.

Most of all, Diana would like to thank all of her colleagues at the Bowdoin College Museum of Art for their hard work in bringing about this exhibition. Intrepid collaboration with Bowdoin professors Pamela Fletcher and Marilyn Reizbaum has enhanced the exhibition immeasurably. Thanks to all of their students for sometimes passing beyond their comfort zones and participating in an interdisciplinary dialogue on modernism. John Eric Anderson's cheerful assistance with innumerable details involved with the manuscript is greatly appreciated. Heartfelt gratitude is extended to Lucie Teegarden for her skillful editing and good humor. Thanks too go to Katie Lee for her inspired catalogue and exhibition title wall designs.

Bowdoin College Museum of Art

Kevin Salatino, *Director*

Victoria Baldwin-Wilson, *Assistant to the Director*

Suzanne K. Bergeron, *Assistant Director for Operations*

Michelle Henning, *Assistant to the Registrar*

Kate Herlihy, *Curatorial Assistant*

Jo Hluska, *Assistant Preparator*

Laura Latman, *Registrar*

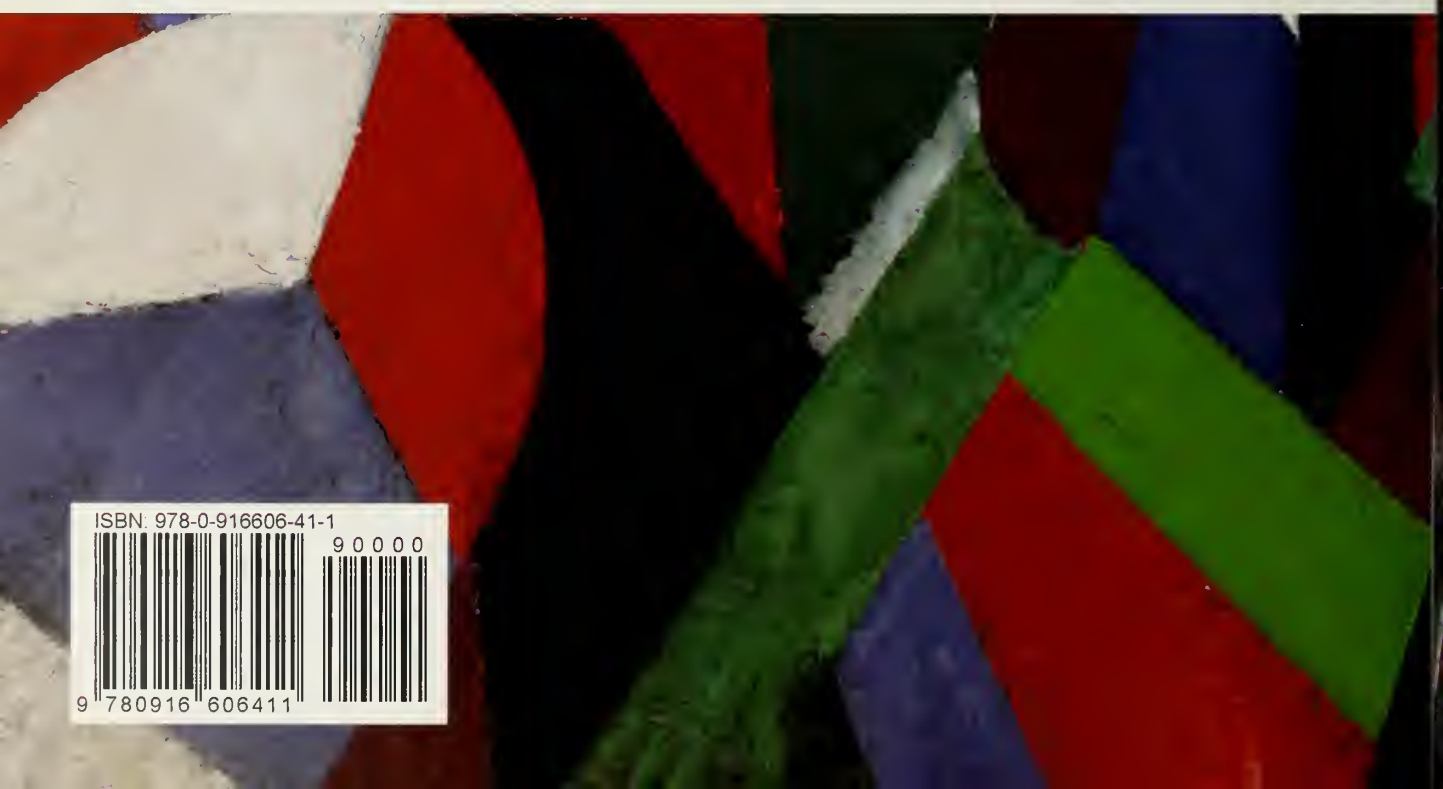
Liza Nelson, *Museum Shop Manager*

José L. Ribas, *Preparator*

Diana K. Tuite, *Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Fellow*

Bowdoin

Bowdoin College Museum of Art



ISBN: 978-0-916606-41-1